IT HAPPENED in a NIGHT — By Edgar Wallace

CHAPTER I.

"WHY is it, Jordan," asked Josephine, pinching her lips thoughtfully, somewhat to the detriment of articulation, "that so many men desert their wives?"

She frowned at the handbills pinned to the cretonne curtains of the dining-room; the portraits which adorned the majority of the slips frowned back. They were frowning men, foreordained to steal guiltily from their slumbering responsibilities and to invoke the energies of the law.

Jordan said nothing. In the first place he was not interested in Josephine's grisly quest, and had long since ceased to protest against her practice of using the dining-room curtains as a rogues' gallery. Accustomed now to the display of police notices concerning deserters, larcenists, burglars and house thieves, he could meet even the portrait of an occasional murderer at breakfast without turning a hair. In the second place——

"Jordan, Jordan! You're asleep!"

"Eh?"

Jordan Yeoman rumpled his gray hair guiltily.

"I wasn't asleep, Josephine—honestly, I heard you, every word. You said something about wives getting their deserts."

"I said nothing of the kind," said his daughter, severely. "You were asleep!"

"Perhaps I was," admitted Mr. Yeoman, and yawned. "Where is Georgina?"

Josephine tilted her chin resolutely. Jordan must be cured of this habit of asking mechanical questions. He was not a bit concerned in the whereabouts of Georgina, or, if he was, he knew that, ink-besplattered and wild of hair, she was sitting in the garret wrestling with her new play. Georgina began writing a new play every week. Sometimes it was completed. More often than not, it went the way of other futilities.

"Where is Helen?" asked Jordan, patiently persistent, as he settled himself to a position of greater comfort in the deep chair.

Josephine did not answer. She knew perfectly well that he had been talking with Helen in the garden half an hour before. She had both seen and heard, for Helen, in her prim way, had been instructing the bored Jordan in the chemistry of farming—Helen came out first in the agricultural class at St. Margarets.

Josephine gazed absently upon the portrait gallery. Unwillingly she confessed that the collection was neither a thrilling nor a promising one. The rewards offered were fairly paltry and the men of whom the police sought information were curiously vapid.

Josephine had this weakness: that she believed a day would dawn when there would walk into her ken a greatly desired criminal, for whose arrest a fabulous reward was offered. She pictured him as a small man, her inferior in physical strength. Between other rehearsals she had practised, with Helen's aid, the exact procedure she would follow.

Helen, whose sporting instincts had not been developed in the course of her stay at St. Margarets, entered a vigorous protest after the third practice.

"Really, father, I should like to oblige Josephine, but I do think she is inconsiderate if she expects me to be knelt upon three times a day and be mauled and gagged with an awful dish-cloth every time I come into the kitchen! Besides, it hurts; kneeling on one, I mean."

"Where does she kneel, ducky?" asked Jordan indiscreetly.

"I'd rather not say, father," said Helen in a tone which did not encourage further inquiry.

Josephine came to the table, pulled out a rush-seated chair, and with an effort addressed herself to the business of account-keeping.

It was a pleasant room, this in which they were, the prettiest in Crab Apple Farm. Spacious, airy, sweet-smelling, the men and women who had chosen its furnishings had been dead these two hundred years. Through the big open window you saw the corner of a garden, splashes of crimson and claret, dapplings of gold and blue. Beyond were the sloping meadows and a flash of silver where the river ran. Beyond, again, the quarry-scarred hills, with a blue and white sky atop.

Josephine was pretty, though nobody had told her so, except Georgina. But she insensibly discounted Georgina's praise, for Georgie was at heart a poet and given to extravagance of speech.

Helen, who had "taken" physiognomy as part of her science training at St. Margarets, said Josephine's nose was too short and her chin too square. She did not think, either, that goldy-brown hair "went" with the peculiar shade of gray in Josephine's eyes.

Helen, being fifteen, felt it was her duty to explain these shortcomings to her sister. Josephine laughed, kissed her, called her "a snub-nosed reptile" and dismissed her with a mince pie. Helen, who had studied hygiene at St. Margarets, knew exactly the effect of pastry upon the complexion and dropped the pie into the pig-stye, where it was greatly appreciated by a lady who had heard nothing of hygiene but knew that warm mince pie tasted good.

Though it was the month of June, a log fire smouldered in the great open fireplace before which Jordan Yeoman nodded and dozed, whilst his capable daughter wrestled with corn and hay accounts. He clung to his fires to the last. She, for her part, found the room oppressively warm and puffed in an unladylike fashion.

"What about this rehearsal?" demanded the playwright, significantly, and Jordan wilted.

"Jordan, you're a fug! I wonder you don't roast. Jordan!"

"Eh? Yes, yes," muttered her father.

"Yes, yes!" she mimicked.

"What the dickens do you want?" he growled. "I've been up half the night with that infernal cow."

Josephine showed her even white teeth in a smile.

"And the cow is alive to tell the tale," she said. "Jordan, have you thought any more about letting the two rooms?"

He shifted uncomfortably.

"I hate the idea of a—a boarder, even a Summer boarder. It is rather low-down, isn't it, Jo? Helen says——"

"Blow Helen!" she answered calmly. "Helen wants a new party dress; we all want clothes badly and there is no money in the bank."

He wriggled his shoulders like a man who was taking an unwanted shower.

"Of course, there is really nothing derogatory to one's dignity in taking a guest," he admitted. "The Saffords have one every year, and old Safford is rolling in money. I don't like the idea particularly, but as you say, money is rather tight."

"So tight that it can't walk straight to Crab Apple Farm," said Josephine vulgarly. "You approve?"

"Well—yes. I'd prefer a maiden lady or a——"

"Never mind about that," interrupted his daughter. "I've already let the rooms."

Jordan sat up suddenly.

"The devil you have? My dear Jo, you're masterful—that is the only word. Absolutely. Helen thinks——"

"That child is certainly thoughtful," said Josephine with a sigh of resignation.

Jordan Yeoman was a gentleman farmer. He had not chosen his profession; rather had it chosen him. The farm had come to him from his father, the one possession which had escaped from the ruin which followed the Weatherbee Bank smash in the 60's. His affairs had prospered, or declined, in ratio to the intelligence and enterprise of his successive managers. Just now he was his own manager. Life to Jordan was a placid current on which he was content to float.

There were alarming moments when he found himself borne into whirlpools and rapids of singular ferocity, and when he needed all his strength and ingenuity to reach calm waters. Once there, he turned over on his back and continued to float. He was floating now

"Has Chinky been over this morning?" he asked.

She shook her head without raising it, her lips moving rapidly, for she was engaged in calculating the amount of oil cakes received in the past six months—and not paid for.

"Something is pretty sure to turn up." He reached out for his pipe and filled it.

"Mick!" she retorted, intent upon her books.

"Mick — who?" he asked, startled.

"Micawber!" she said.

He chuckled softly and lit his pipe with great care and deliberation.

"Respect for grey hairs was never a weakness of yours, Jo. But, maybe, if I had been a stern father to you I shouldn't have got half the fun out of life I have. The Bishop thinks it is most unusual for a girl to call her father by his Christian name, and Mrs. Bishop is speechless when she hears you."

"I wish she was," said Josephine grimly.

She leant back in her chair and nibbled the end of her pen, her pained eyes on the sum of her calculations.

"Jordan, my boy," she said slowly, "we're in a hole! The only thing that can save our affairs from everlasting demnition is the Tremendous Jones."

"Eh?"

"The Tremendous Jones," she repeated, "the lodger will help, but his assistance is the merest drop in a bucket. The Tremendous Jones or a fine healthy murderer with a whole heap of blood money on his head."

Jordan sniffed.

"You've been listening to Georgina," he accused. "I'm not sure that this playwriting of hers has a wholesome effect upon our little household. I suppose the Tremendous Jones is the title of her newest play? And let me tell you this, Josephine," he struggled up from the depths of his chair to emphasize a solemn warning, "I completely and uncompromisingly refuse to take part in any more of Georgina's rehearsals! The sentiments she puts into the mouths of her characters are abhorent to me as a Christian and a law-abiding citizen. I will not stand up in this room and sneer at Bishops and capitalism as I had to in her last play."

"You'll do whatever is required of you, Jordan," said Josephine firmly. Then a thought struck her. "Perhaps the lodger can take a part," she said, "I must suggest that to Georgina."

CHAPTER II.

THE office of Mr. Gallet-Morpeth was situated on the top floor of a very high building. It was said that he had chosen this position in the hope that a time would come when elevators would cease to function, so that he might spend at least one day without interviewing indignant and slighted stars. For Mr. Morpeth was a theatrical manager, of considerable wealth and influence. Except for two framed play-bills that hung on the walls, and a scene model that stood on a table, there was little in the office, or even in his appearance to suggest his unhallowed calling. He was a stout, bald man, mild of face and modest of demeanor, and he smoked a pipe that was black and polished and of a respectable size.

That pipe lay on his writing table and he himself was standing before the scene model whistling softly, when the telephone bell rang. Since he was quite alone, he had perforce to answer the call.

"Hello?—no. I can't talk to you now, Miss Staverly. I've got twenty people in the room. See the stage manager. No, I can't put your song back, my dear, and if you are doing nothing in the play, why worry?. Say, you get your salary don't you? It was a good song? Yuh! People are talking about the scandalous way you've been treated? Oh, yuh! They're talking about it? I saw a crowd on the street as I came along. I wondered what they were mightily interested in. See Mr. Jackson."

He sighed as he put down the receiver and pressed a bell, which was answered by his capable stenographer, book in hand.

"Tell the stage manager that Miss Staverly says she will walk out unless her song is put back. Tell him to encourage her."

"To do what?"

"To walk out," said Mr. Morpeth in his sad, even tones. "She has a six months' contract, and she draws like a property magnet." He tossed a letter across. "Answer this. Say—well say that we haven't an opening for a new musical comedy star. Tell her the usual Aunt Annie stuff. Stage is a very hard profession, full of disappointments and temptations. And tell her that even the temptations aren't worth looking forward to. Tell her she'd better stick to her work in the jam factory.

The secretary, examining the letter, looked up.

"It is dramatic academy—not jam factory," she explained.

"Same thing." He passed another letter to her. "This man wants three stalls for Thursday night for 'your beautiful drama Clara Belle'—where are the returns for last night?"

The secretary found a printed form on which some figures were scrawled.

Mr. Morpeth read the amount given at the foot of the blank.

"Yes. Seventy in the house last night. I went in myself and I thought they'd forgotten to open the doors."

The girl gathered the hateful returns to the bundle on her knee.

"It is a frost, isn't it?"

Mr. Morpeth's laugh was without merriment.

"Frost? That play would give rheumatism to a polar bear!"

Secretaries to theatrical managers are not unused to such tragedies. Yet Gallet-Morpeth made fewer mistakes than any man in the business, and as she had been on her holidays when the play had been accepted——

"Did Mr. Jones read it before it was produced?" she asked, interested.

Morpeth shook his head.

"Of course he didn't. It wouldn't have been produced if he had. No, it never looked like being more than an artistic success. I put it on to oblige a friend. He's a friend of mine no longer. Jones! Good Lord no! Now about these tickets. Send him—send him four stalls—it will prevent his feeling lonely. 'Dear Sir, I have pleasure in enclosing four stalls for Clara Belle. Owing to the great success of this drama—this romantic drama—I am not able to send you more.' No, Jones never makes a mistake about a play," he went on gloomily. "Mind you, I knew that Clara Belle was a failure as soon I read the press notices. They said too much about the 'clever acting' and when acting appears clever, you can bet that the play is rotten. You don't notice that they're acting in a good play. Not until Saturday night. Here's another girl who wants to go on the stage. Choke her off, and here's Corelli's account. By the way, tell him I must have those new costumes for the Broadway production by MONDAY AFTERNOON AT THE LATEST! Tell him we're opening on Tuesday and send a notice to the press that we're opening next week."

The girl paused, her pencil raised.

"Tuesday?"

"No, Friday."

Miss Temmit smiled.

"That's an unlucky day."

"Yes," Morpeth stared out of the window. "Every day is unlucky in this business. I am not going to postpone it. People will think it is a revue. Send these plays back." He picked up a bundle from the table. "This and this and that. And this one, too, and that one."

"Are they bad?" she asked sympathetically.

"If you were as bad as they are, you'd be no lady," said the sad Morpeth, rubbing his bald head irritably. "Now just take this. 'Miss Georgina Yeoman, Crab Apple Farm (that's a pretty name). Seven Corners. Dear Madam: I have read the two plays which you have submitted and I like them, but am taking a further opinion upon them. I will write you again when I have had an opportunity of consulting Mr. Cicero Jones, my reader. Sincerely, &c.' Here's her letter."

"She signs it George Yeo?" said Miss Temmit, casting a swift professional glance over the letter.

"Yes, that's her nom de guerre. I wonder why people always take funny names when they get connected with the stage? Modesty, perhaps, though I've never noticed that in authors. Maybe it's a sense of decency. That's all, I think."

She had only been gone out of the room a second before she returned.

"Mr. Cicero Jones," she announced, and Morpeth spun round with a hint of satisfaction on his dismal face.

"The very man! Ask Mr. Jones to come in."

The man who entered with a quick, nervous step, was young and his horn-rimmed spectacles had the effect of emphasizing his youth. He was tall and because of his height, appeared slender. But for those scholarly glasses, he might have been mistaken for anybody but a student of dramatic writing. Taking a hundred guesses at his profession, few would have included "authorship." He was too neatly dressed to deserve the appellation of "artistic"; his hair was close cropped, his clothes well cut.

Morpeth crossed the room to meet him.

"Hullo, old thing—you're the very fellow I wanted to see," he pointed to the table. "Voila!"

The nose of Cicero Jones wrinkled.

"Plays?" he asked unpleasantly.

Morpeth nodded.

"Two very good plays—I think."

"Well, buy 'em," said the other decisively. "Buy 'em and make a fortune!"

"I want you to read them first," began the manager.

Mr. Jones shook his head vigorously.

"No, thank you."

Mr. Morpeth stared.

"What's the matter?"

"No plays for a month—those are my doctor's orders," said Mr. Cicero Jones with emphasis. "Do you realize that every play that is now being performed in this city was read by me, and that they were the best of 600 others that I read? Do you wonder why I am suffering from a nervous breakdown?"

Morpeth was concerned.

"Joking apart—are you really ill?"

The young man nodded.

"I am a sick man. My nerves are like that!" He held out his shaking hand. "I'm sorry, Morpeth, but I can't do it. I'm going away into the country.'

"Where?"

"I shan't tell you," said Cicero Jones emphatically. "I will not have the innocent countryside polluted with triangle dramas." He picked up one of the manuscripts with every evidence of distaste. "Whose stuff is it—Mandan's?"

"Mandan's!" said Mr. Morpeth scornfully. "Good lord no! These are plays—real good stuff, I think. Amateurish in construction in certain parts, but that could be put right in no time. No, these are by a new author."

Cicero's lip curled.

"I know," he said sardonically. "Long soliloquies of why the woman left her husband in Act. I. Long soliloquies of why she is returning to him in Act. II. Long soliloquies of why he won't take her back in Act. III. Curtain on two perfectly dead bodies lying in a blue spot light!"

Mr. Morpeth smiled.

"Wrong! One of them is a farcical comedy——"

The other waved aside his explanation.

"Let me guess—don't tell me. Husband takes a girl out to dinner and meets his wife with another man. Second act in bachelor's flat——"

"No. Now you'll read these for me?" he wheedled, but his visitor leapt up from the chair in which he had seated himself.

"No, no, no, no, no!"

His vehement refusal had the accompaniment of the telephone bell. Usually Mr. Morpeth did not welcome the intervention of temperamental actresses, but this was an exceptional occasion.

"Yuh — yuh? Hello, Kitty. Well, I don't know. I've got what I think is a real good part for you. You're on the stage all the time and you've got every curtain. No, not Shakespeare. He didn't write those kind of plays. I know he was—about 300 years behind—well, I can't tell you about this play yet—Jones won't read it—yuh, he says so, he's here sitting right here—all right—Kitty Majesco—she wants to talk to you."

His smile was triumphant as he held out the receiver invitingly. Cicero Jones had a weak spot for Kitty.

"I don't want to talk to anybody," snarled the young man. "Oh, all right! Hello, Miss Majesco. Yes, good morning, I'm just leaving for the country—I'm awfully sorry, but I really can't—my nerves are in a terrible state—why don't you read them yourself—oh, I see—you don't know what a play is like until you see it on the stage—yes, there are a lot of people like you. But Miss Majesco—well, Kitty then—oh, all right—yes—yes—I know. The trouble with me is that I've got too sweet a disposition—a sweet disposition, I said!" he howled. "Good-by!"

Slamming down the receiver he glared at Morpeth.

"It is too bad. I want a holiday."

"You'll enjoy reading these," said Mr. Morpeth smilingly.

Mr. Jones made a noise signifying his scepticism.

"The author's real name——" began the manager, and Jones swung round on him.

"I don't care a tinker's curse what his name is," he said savagely. "I am not interested in his personality, his habits, his make of car or his views on Bolshevism—all I'm interested in is a hammock swung between two apple trees and rough meadow spangled with buttercups and a bit of cobalt sky and a few fleecy clouds above and the song of the skylark in the blue."

"Sounds like a good back-cloth to me," said the soulless Morpeth, "with lark effects from the orchestra, thunder off. Enter fair village maiden swinging sunbonnet. 'It is twelve o'clock and the young squire has not returned from the village—see, there he comes, ta-ra-a-ah!'"

Mr. Jones had picked up the manuscripts from the table and was thrusting them viciously into his bag.

"These will kill me," he said ominously, "and you'll be responsible. You've spoilt my holiday, you and that—charming actress. You've taken the joy out of the cornfields and I hope you're satisfied. Plays! George Yeo! George Whato!"

After he had slammed out of the room Mr. Morpeth gazed attentively at the door through which he had passed.

"George Whato!" he repeated and shook his head.

Such flippancy was unusual in the staid Mr. Jones.

CHAPTER III.

MR. ERNEST CHARLES DOWLING was a modest disciple of the muses. A stoutish young man, comfortably circumstanced, the limits of his estate touched the hedge of wild woodbine that marked the northernmost boundary of Mr. Yeoman's demesne. He was not a gentleman farmer, though he was a gentleman and owned farms. A violently engined racing car, a passion for rose growing and a taste in poetry occupied his pleasant days and ecstatic nights. He wrote about flowers and soaring birds and waterfalls, and other articles of poetical interest, and he rhymed "clearest" with "dearest" and "rose" with "grows" and "eyes" with "skies," with considerable cleverness and feeling.

He brought his car into the yard of Crab Apple Farm one afternoon, waited for a considerable time whilst he removed his duster, brushed his coat and smoothed his hair. Then, taking a white bundle from the back seat, he tenderly stripped the paper covering from a bunch of roses, straightened his tie and walked into the kitchen. There was no reason in the world why he should not have entered the house by the front door. It thrilled Mr. Dowling, however, to make his invariable entry by way of the dairy and kitchen.

Mrs. Mumble, the stay and prop of the Yeoman establishment, straightened herself up from her bread-board and gleamed benevolently over her spectacles.

"Good afternon, Mr. Dowling. Lord! You gave me quite a start!"

Every event, expected or otherwise, gave Mrs. Mumble "quite a start."

Chinky Dowling laid down the roses clear of the flour that almost

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covered the table and drew a long breath.

"Would you give these to Miss Yeoman when she comes in?" he asked.

It was a fiction maintained by Chinky that Georgina was "out" when he called. This also was his standing excuse—had he ever been called upon to excuse himself—for his unceremonious entrance by way of the kitchen.

"She ain't out!" said Mrs. Mumble complacently. "She's upstairs in her studio."

"Study, Mrs. Mumble," murmured Chinky.

"Study is it? I always git 'em mixed up. Shall I call her?"

Chinky started nervously.

"No, no, Mrs. Mumble," he hesitated. "There's a note in the flowers," he added.

"Shall I take it out?" asked the misguided woman.

"No, please," he urged. "It is—er—a little poem."

Mrs. Mumble wiped her floury hands and regarded him with astonishment.

"You made it up yourself?" she asked. "Dear me, you must be clever, Mr. Dowling!"

The stout young man went red.

"Oh, well, of course, I can't compare myself to Miss Yeoman."

Mrs. Mumble shook her head.

"Ah, but she's got brains," she said, and sensing a lack of compliment went on heartily, "and you may have 'em too, for all I know—but Miss Yeoman! She wrote another play last week."

"Did she?" said the awe-stricken Mr. Dowling.

He could not remember when he had come to the kitchen for these preciously intimate talks about Georgina, when he had not learnt that Georgina had written, or was writing, a new play. Yet every fresh revelation of her genius filled him with a novel wonder.

"She did!" said Mrs. Mumble proudly, "her and Miss Josephine have been acting it all the morning. It's remarkable! I don't know how she does it. Only uses an ordinary pen, the same as you and me might."

Mr. Dowling murmured that poetry took some writing too.

"I dare say it does," said the loyal housekeeper. "I often wonder how people can have the patience to write it; but I suppose it's habit, like everything else. Look at the way the man at the circus balanced a lady on his head—that's habit, ain't it?"

Chinky thought he heard a familiar voice at that moment.

"Yes—you'll give Miss Yeoman the flowers?" he said, making preparation for flight.

"Certainly I will."

"Er—you might mention that there's a note there. You needn't say it is poetry."

Mrs. Mumble gave him a reproachful look.

"Oh, Mr. Dowling, you know I wouldn't put her off reading it."

Ready to fly, he lingered and the old woman on her favorite theme went on.

"Miss Georgina's plays! The one she wrote at Easter. I cried over it—I did. About the mother and the little child! It upset me for a week. I never enjoyed myself so much in my life," she added inconsequently.

Mr. Dowling ventured to suppose that one of these days they would see them played, and Mrs. Mumble agreed.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," she said stoutly. "I've known some remarkable things to happen in my life. Who'd ever have thought my husband would have been killed by falling out of a balloon? Why, if anybody had told me that was going to happen, I should have laughed!"

Chinky regarded her with alarm. And yet she seemed a kind-hearted woman.

"I wouldn't be surprised at anything that happened to Miss Georgina," said Mrs. Mumble. "I wouldn't even be surprised if she didn't marry very well indeed."

"Er—yes," agreed the young man, without any great heartiness.

"She'll have to go away from here to do it—what can she find about here, Mr. Dowling? Just cheap people and nobodies?"

Mr. Dowling, standing miserably on one leg, thought it was likely.

"She's bound to do well," said Mrs. Mumble emphatically. "Now, Miss Josephine won't do well, that's my firm conviction. She's too independent. Men don't want independent women. A man likes a woman to look up to him, and how can she look up to him if she's independent?"

The door flew open and Jordan Yeoman strode in.

"Hello, Chinky. Mrs. Mumble teaching you to make pies?"

"Good afternoon, Mr. Yeoman," said Chinky, nervously. "Er——"

"Tea ready, Mrs. Mumble?"

"No, sir, it is half an hour to tea time."

Chinky, in an agony of apprehension, saw his retreat barred and the possibility of an enforced meeting with the god-like Georgina made him go cold.

"Come along into the dining-room," said Jordan. "Where are the girls—have you seen them, Ernest?"

"No, sir—I only just looked in! I've a—an engagement——"

"Miss Georgina is in her study, sir," said Mrs. Mumble. "Miss Helen is in the garden and Miss Josephine is getting the room ready for the new gentleman."

Jordan nodded.

"The boarder, eh?"

"Boarder?" gasped the alarmed Chinky.

Jordan took him by the arm and led him into the big dining-room.

"Yes—the girls think it is a sin and a shame that we should have two rooms in the house lying empty all Summer, so they advertised in one of the papers—you know the sort of thing. 'Beautiful old farm house, electric light, &c.'"

Mr. Dowling wiped his damp forehead.

"But, good heavens—er—how will you like that, Mr. Yeoman?"

Jordan shrugged.

"I? I don't care if it amuses them. I'm glad for them to get the extra money. So long as the gentleman isn't too impossible."

"It is rather a risk, isn't it?" asked the agitated young man. "I mean, getting strange people in."

Jordan laughed.

"You mean the possibility of his making love to the girls? Georgina is too engrossed in her plays, and I'd like to meet the man who had the courage to make love to Josephine. And as for Helen, why she'd freeze him to death!"

"Of course, he may be quite old."

"As a matter of fact, he's comparatively young," said Jordan. "We had his references from his bankers and they were very satisfactory. Are you staying to tea?" he asked as Mrs. Mumble bustled in, tray in hand.

"Oh, dear no. I just dropped in to leave some roses for—er—Miss Georgina."

"And a note," said the helpful Mrs. Mumble.

"And, of course, a note," said the other, hurriedly. "Is Georgina writing a new play?"

"Yes, I suppose she is, Chinky," said Mr. Yeoman, carelessly. "I can't remember when she wasn't. I wouldn't mind her writing plays if she didn't ask me to rehearse them. Of course, it is Josephine who bullies me into it. I forget what I was last time. Do you remember, Mrs. Mumble?"

The stout lady stopped laying the table to consider.

"I think you were a gentleman that took drugs, sir."

"That was the one before," corrected Jordan. "No, the last time, if I remember rightly, I was a burglar."

"Miss Josephine is a little—domineering, isn't she?" suggested Chinky. He had reason to hold such a view and Jordan Yeoman's eyes twinkled.

"Hello, has she been bullying you?"

"What I complain about, sir," Mrs. Mumble saved the youth from his embarrassment, "is Miss Josephine's language."

Jordan grinned. Josephine's violent vocabulary was his secret delight.

"She's built that way, Mrs. Mumble. Why, my dear mother, God rest her, swore like a trooper! It is a fact. They say she started in her cradle and yet she was as good a woman as ever lived. It is a family characteristic. An ancestor of ours told George the Third to go to hell and got a knighthood for it. I'm not sure whether he got a knighthood or was hanged. Anyway he was distinguished by his profanity. There's Georgina!" he said suddenly at the sound of a footstep on the stairs.

Mr. Dowling hastily gathered his hat.

"I won't wait. Good-by, Mr. Yeoman."

"Stay and have some tea," urged Jordan. "You can see Georgina and give her the flowers yourself."

"And the note," added the kindly Mrs. Mumble.

"No, thank you, I have to get back. Good—good-by——"

He was out of the room and half way to the yard before Georgina came in.

CHAPTER IV.

GEORGINA YEOMAN was by common agreement the prettiest member of the family, in spite of her untidy hair and her queerly masculine gait. She waved an inky hand to her parent.

"Didn't I hear Ernest Charles, Mrs. Mumble?"

"Yes, miss. He left you these flowers."

Georgina took up the roses.

"How lovely!"

"There's a note inside, by all accounts," whispered Mrs. Mumble hoarsely, and made mysterious signals.

"Where's Helen?" asked Jordan from the window.

"In the garden communing with nature. That child is too serious for this family. Helen, Helen!" she shrilled, and Helen Yeoman's precise voice answered her.

Helen was slim and tall. Her hair was carefully drawn back to show a high, white forehead, and was plaited irreproachably. Her schoolgirl dress was worn decorously long, and from the toes of her trim shoes to the black ribbon in her hair she was all propriety. ("Helen," said Josephine, describing her, "is the kind of kid that has never come to the table with messy hands and has never had a hole in her stocking. She's inhuman.")

She crossed to where Jordan was sitting in his favorite chair, and kissing him sedately on the forehead, sat down on a hassock by his side.

"Jordan, I've finished the play," said Georgina.

"Have you duck? I'll bet it's a winner!"

"It is lovely!" said Georgina, shamelessly. "Josephine says—well, ask Josephine."

Josephine came in at that moment, and came with a crash and the utterance of words half-stifled.

Helen frowned painfully.

"Who put that dam—damp cloth upon the stairs?" she demanded, wrathfully. "Did I hear the dulcet tone of Ernest Charles, or did my ears deceive me?"

"Leave Chinky alone," said Georgina. "He brought me these flowers."

"Hullo, Jordan, been to market?" Josephine's hand dropped on her father's shoulder. She had not seen him that day, for Jordan had left at an uncomfortably early hour.

He nodded.

"Yes."

"Sell anything?"

"No," said Jordan, squirming.

"Did you see the bank man?" demanded the remorseless Josephine.

"I did," said her father, defiantly. "He was very reasonable about the overdraft." He dropped his hand caressingly upon Helen's head.

"Is he going to increase it?" demanded Josephine.

Helen turned up a reproving face.

"I really don't think you should worry dear father," she said; "he must be very tired; aren't you, dear?"

Josephine's sneer was almost audible.

"Oh, look at Helen," she scoffed. "Here's a picture for you, Georgia! Fair child crouched at ruined father's feet—caressing hand. Looks up at cruel sister with sorrowful eyes!"

"You just leave Helen alone, too," said Jordan, good humoredly.

"I can't leave anybody alone, Jordan—not to-day. The day the lodger comes."

"I think 'lodger' sounds awful. Why not 'paying guest,' Josephine?" she asked, severely.

"Because he hasn't paid yet," said the practical Josephine. "He's 'lodger' till Saturday."

Jordan's face clouded.

"I hope he is not going to give you a lot of trouble," he said, and Josephine for once agreed with him.

"I hope so for his sake—if he does, I'll chuck him out!"

"Chuck?" murmured Helen.

"What would you say, angel—'shove'?"

"At St. Margaret's," said Helen, gently, "I used to fine the girls for slang. In fact, Miss Reppley said that from the day I became head girl the tone of the school improved immensely."

"I wonder you can sleep at night. Any letters?"

"The post isn't in yet."

"Was there anything this morning?" asked Jordan.

"Nothing—it is the mail I'm thinking of. I wonder how they'll like 'The Farers.'"

Jordan had once tried to keep tag of Georgie's plays; he had given up after the fortieth.

"That is the last but one, isn't it?"

"No. I wrote that last Summer," said Georgina. "We shan't hear how they like 'The Farers' for a long time."

"The manager hasn't had it more than a year," explained the cynical Josephine.

"If you'll forgive me saying so," said Helen, "I don't think they'll accept it!"

"And why not?" demanded Josephine, hands on hips, glaring down at the youthful sceptic.

"It is much too violent—the language is so strong. Don't you think so, papa?"

Jordan waved helpless hands.

"What does it matter what papa thinks, you unmodern child? I certainly thought it was a pretty good play, and the last one was a real fine one. I read it and it made me roar with laughter—what was it called?—'The Wanderer.'"

Georgina's face fell.

"That was supposed to be a tragedy, Jordan," hissed Josephine.

"Oh, was it?" said her father feebly. "I get all mixed with 'em."

"No," said Josephine. "I think 'The Wanderer' is certain to be referred to the Tremendous Jones."

"The who? Did you mention that name before? I thought that it was the title of a play."

"Do you mean to tell me that you've never heard of the Tremendous Jones?" asked Josephine, amazed. "Why, he reads for every big theatre in London. There are constantly paragraphs about him in the newspapers."

"Reads?"

Georgina explained.

"Don't you know that plays have to be read by an expert before they're produced? Managers don't understand plays! They keep a man to read for them."

A light dawned through Mr. Yeoman's clouded intelligence.

"I see—so Jones—why do you call him Tremendous?"

"Well, isn't he?" asked Josephine impatiently. "If he says a play is good—it doesn't matter what the critics say. And if he says a play's bad——" She turned down her thumbs expressively and a shocked Helen closed her eyes.

"Tea, everybody," said Josephine, as Mrs. Mumble came in with the teapot. "Jordan, love, we want you after tea; so rush!"

"Oh, lord, what am I this afternoon?" Jordan's face underwent a change.

"You're Sir Milford Scarborough," said Josephine briskly.

"Sounds like a bad lot——"

"He's rotten," agreed his daughter.

Helen, on her father's right, heaved a deep sigh.

"That was the one expression we never allowed at St. Margaret's, papa. I used to tell the prefects——"

"I bet they wept when you left school, little sister," said Georgina.

"There was a certain amount of regret," Helen's voice did not want for complacency.

"Hypocritical little devils!"

"Any new rewards turned up, Jo?" asked Mr. Yeoman, tactfully, and Josephine jumped to her feet.

"Oh, yes—I got the 'Hue and Cry' this morning."

She flew across the room and up the stairs.

"I think it is so absurd, papa, don't you?" asked Helen, and the cautious Mr. Yeoman offered no opinion. In a sense, Josephine, who had many of his qualities, was nearer himself when she was engaged in this fantastic hobby, than she was at any other time.

"We've got to get money from somewhere, Jordan," said his eldest daughter. "I thought with my plays I should have made at least a hundred thousand. Look at the fortunes that have been made out of 'Star of Baghdad.' Why, they say that the manager buys a new car every Friday afternoon! And Jo may get a reward. You get anything you try hard for—pass the jam, Evangeline."

Helen's nose went up.

"I'm not going to pass it until you call me by my proper name," she said, haughtily.

Mr. Jordan threatened to sing. There was no more effective method of silencing all controversy and soothing discordance. Once he had carried his threat into execution—only once. The family remembered.

"Well, who is it now?" he asked, as Josephine came running down the stairs, paper in hand, "the man who abandoned his wife and seven children and left them chargeable to the town, or the believed to be concerned in the jewel robbery?"

"Oh, them!" said Josephine, contemptuously, as she opened the folded paper.

Helen shivered.

"No," said Josephine, "this is a two thousand prize. Listen. 'Wanted for felony, John Franklin, aged 25. Medium height, dark hair, grey eyes, clean shaven, rather long face, in the habit of wearing horn-rimmed spectacles. Has a sullen manner, is short of speech, but talks like an educated man. Will probably be in possession of large quantities of bonds stolen from the Ninth National Bank. Very likely to make his way westward by road. He speaks several languages. He has a practice of stroking his chin, and his favorite pose is that of a man who is suffering or recovering from a nervous breakdown. The above reward will be paid by the bank for the arrest and conviction of the fugitive.'"

"Two thousand!" mused Jordan.

"Making his way West!" Georgina's eyes shone. "What a wonderful situation for a drama!"

It struck Helen in quite another way.

"Poor man! How sad to think that one is hunted like a wild animal. Perhaps if he had had the influence of a good home——"

"Look what a good home has done for you!" said Josephine.

"I'm only thinking of some poor woman who is praying for his safety," said Helen, gently.

"What about this poor woman who is praying to catch him?" demanded her sister. "Jordan, we must find some money. Have you any?"

"Very little," said Jordan. "I'll get a check to-morrow from the Dairy Syndicate."

"One of the cows was affected by the storm yesterday, papa. When I tried to stroke her nose she ran away like mad."

"What cow wouldn't?" asked Josephine. "But about money?"

"Do you want it pretty badly?"

Josephine nodded. She had meant to speak to him the night before.

"Mumble's wages were due on Armistice Day," she said, "and Helen wants new underclothes."

"Really!" said the outraged Helen.

"Well, don't you?"

"I hardly think it is a thing to talk about to dear daddy."

"Didn't you know she wore——" Jordan interrupted.

"Jo, you're indelicate. I'll raise you something by Saturday."

"Perhaps John Franklin will come along," sneered Helen.

"If he knew the state of your undies, he'd fly into my arms," Josephine retorted. "We can't expect Mr. Jones to pay in advance."

"Jones! Is that the young man lodger?" asked Georgie, who took very little interest in household affairs. "I wonder if he knows our Mr. Jones?"

"They're all one family," suggested Josephine, "descended from the original Jonah. What is wrong, Mumble?"

Mrs. Mumble had come into the room with a face of woe and a basket of eggs in her hand.

"That hen wouldn't sit, Mr. Yeoman. I thought she wouldn't. She sat there for a day and then she went back to the run."

"Have you been stroking her nose, Helen?" asked Josephine, accusingly. "Put 'em on the chair, Mrs. Mumble."

"Now what about these cammies of Miss Helen's?" asked that lady, discharging two duties at once, and Helen stiffened.

"Mrs. Mumble!" she said, awfully. "Haven't you any regard for propriety?"

Josephine pointed to the chair where the eggs reposed.

"Just take a look at 'em and see if you have!" she said. "Leave them, Mumble. We'll have a court of inquiry when the man has gone. Restrain your natural agitation, Helen."

Georgina folded her serviette and nodded to Josephine. Together they rose.

"What about this rehearsal?" demanded the playwright, significantly, and Jordan wilted.

(To Be Continued Next Sunday)

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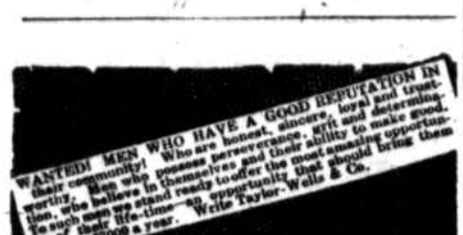

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ONLY ONE TUBE TO A FAMILY

IT HAPPENED in a NIGHT— By Edgar Wallace

"'Yes—that afternoon I met Reginald by the lake. I accused him! He sneered at me! All the dormant madness in me leaped to life! I sprang at him—he lost his balance and fell into the water! He tried to escape, but I thrust him down with my foot, down, down, down!'"

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

JORDAN YEOMAN is a gentleman farmer with three daughters. Josephine is the business head of the family, and calls her father by his first name. She has this weakness: that she believes a day will dawn when there will walk into her ken a greatly desired criminal for whose arrest a fabulous reward is offered. Georgina aspiros to be a playwright and the members of the family assist her in rehearsing her plays. Helen is a very prim and punctilious little girl of fifteen, just out of school. The Yeomans have rented one of their spare rooms to a Summer boarder named Jones, who is expected to arrive in a few days. Cicero Jones, known as "The Tremendous Jones" in the theatrical world, is a reader for managers. His opinion of the availability of plays is considered infallible. Before he leaves on his Summer vacation a manager gives him two of Georgina's plays to read while he is away. He does not know that the author is a member of the family with whom he is going to spend his vacation. Josephine is reading in a local paper that there has been a big bank robbery and the burglar is headed in their direction when Georgina calls a rehearsal of one of her plays.

(Continued from Last Sunday)

CHAPTER V.

TO a man with predilections toward a smooth-running life, it was something of a handicap and an inquietude to be related to stage-struck women. Not that either was stage-struck in the accepted sense of the word. Georgie wrote plays; to Jordan they were good, but then, he knew nothing about plays or authors.

But of all the drawbacks which this play-writing business presented none equalled in point of inconvenience, amounting sometimes to a positive misery, this detestable practice of roping him in to read a part in one of Georgie's rehearsals.

"Must I rehearse? These hasty meals are going to play the devil with my digestion," he complained but none the less obeyed.

"Help push the table over in the corner, Jordan," said his energetic daughter. "Exercise is what you want."

Mrs. Mumble, an interested spectator of the moving scene, waited.

"Will you be wanting me, miss?" she asked.

Georgina consulted her script.

"Let me see, what were you?"

"I was the young lady that led the young gentleman into temptation," said Mrs. Mumble hopefully.

Georgina shook her head.

"That was the farce—no, this is the drama, 'The Wanderer,' Mrs. Mumble—there isn't a part for you."

A disgruntled actress went back to the kitchen and the peeling of potatoes.

A clear space was now made. Josephine, trained in dining-room stage craft, had rearranged the furniture to meet the requirements of the scene, and now turned her attention to Jordan. That worthy man had stealthily pulled his chair to the fireplace and had unobtrusively disappeared from view.

"Jordan!" called Josephine sharply.

There was no answer.

"Jordan! Damn the boy, he's gone to sleep again!"

"Oh!" a horrified gasp from Helen.

"Well?" Josephine snapped, "it is a classical quotation—from Dickens."

"To one's own father!" said the shocked Helen.

"To three's own father, if you don't mind," said Josephine. "You're not the only child. Jordan!"

Jordan woke with a start.

"What do I do?" he complained.

"You can sit where you are," said Josephine. "You're Sir Milford Scarborough."

"Oh," said Jordan blankly.

Georgina rumpled his hair.

"You haven't got much to say, so don't grouch, darling," she coaxed and Jordan growled again.

"I'm not grouching. But why am I always the villain?"

"All Georgina's male characters are villains," explained Helen. "Even the clergymen. I'm not saying they aren't true to life. Clergymen can be as bad as anybody, but——"

"I wish you'd keep the Sunday papers out of that child's hands, Georgie," said Josephine in despair. "Now, is everybody ready?"

Everybody was ready. Mr. Yeoman, with his script on his knee, nodded heavily.

"Go ahead, Georgie."

Georgina had retired to the vicinity of the stairs. Now she stalked tragically toward the dozing Jordan.

"'Have you nothing to say to me?'" she asked in hollow tones. Apparently Jordan hadn't.

"Go on, Jordan!" encouraged Josephine anxiously.

Jordan blinked.

"Eh—er—what?"

"'Have you nothing to say to me?'" repeated Georgina, and her father fumbled with the manuscript.

"'Nothing,'" he read rapidly and monotonously, "'you have made your bed, lie on it, lie on it——' by the way, who made my bed last night, Jo?"

Josephine dropped into a chair with a moan of anguish.

"They forgot to take the extra blanket off, that's all," explained Jordan hurriedly.

"Will you leave these sordid matters until after we have finished!" demanded the exasperated stage manager. "Get on with the play!"

"'Have you nothing to say to me?'" asked Georgina for the third time.

"'Nothin,'" read Jordan. "'You have made your own bed, lie on it, lie on it, lie on it!'"

"'And this is the reward of my devotion,'" said Georgina clasping her hands tragically. "'For this I loved you, left my home, my friends, gave up my career! Ah, you can smile! When I see you standing there with your head held high, looking at me with contempt—I recognize the devil lurking in your eyes. My God! What a fool I've been!'"

Helen shuddered.

"I know you'll think I'm a prude," she said, "but there's an awful lot of profanity in this play. Remember, Georgina, children may be taken to see this."

"Oh, shut up, Helen! You can always tone it down for the matinees—go on Georgina."

But Georgina had for the moment given up the attempt to rehearse.

"I can't possibly get any idea how this is going if I am constantly interrupted. And I do so want to know how it will appeal to the managers."

"I'm sure people won't like it," insisted Helen. "At St. Margaret's we always cut the D's and the G's out of our plays."

"Oh, smother St. Margaret's!" said Josephine wildly. "Go on, Georgina."

Georgina took up her script again.

"'What — a — fool — I've—been—what a fool I've been! But beware, Milford Scarborough! Beware! Ha! You start! So I have touched you on the raw! You need not frown at me! You cannot make me fear you. Heaven will not allow such a man as you to triumph! You smile'—this is where you come on, Jo."

"Oh, yes!"

"'Lady Violet!'" breathed Georgina.

"'What are you doing here with my husband?'" demanded Josephine sternly.

"'Your husband, ha, ha, ha!'" sneered Georgina.

Josephine's eyebrows rose.

"'Your attitude is strange, Mildred Burton—Great God!'"

Helen made a disparaging noise.

"You can go out if you don't like it, Helen!" said Josephine furiously, "but for heaven's sake don't sniff!"

"I do think you're overdoing it, really!" said Helen with resignation. "Why not 'Good Gracious!' At St. Margaret's——"

"Shut your ears if it shocks you," suggested Josephine and was once more the injured heroine. "Now then—'What is this man to you?'"

"'He—is—my—husband!'" said Georgina tragically.

Josephine started back.

"'Ah, no! No! No!'"

"Four 'no's,'" murmured the disapproving prompter.

"'No. It is not true—it is not ter — ue!'" gasped Josephine. "'My—goodness! It's not true. Milford! Say that it is not true! Speak!'" She dropped her hand on Jordan's shoulder and shook him. "Here! Wake up, Jordan! You're snoring when you ought to be sneering!"

Jordan came to consciousness with a painful grimace.

"Eh, what—oh, yes. 'Let him perish, let him perish!'"

Dramatist and stage manager howled together.

"You don't start perishing anybody until the last act," said Josephine with painful calm. "You've got the wrong page, Jordan, let me show you—there you are—'It is false, false, false!'"

"Oh, yes, I see. 'It is false, false, false'—what about a pipe?" he pleaded.

"You'll get no pipe until we've finished this act," hissed Josephine. "Now sneer! That's not a sneer that's a sniff! Go on Georgina."

"'Milford! You cannot mean that! Ah, no! You are jesting, Milford! You cannot deny your wife—your innocent child! You do! I see it in your eyes!'"

"'You turn your head away. You laugh! You laugh! Ah, woe—woe! My—heavens, he laughs!'" ("Och!" snored Jordan, his chin dropping to his chest.) "'Then I am indeed lost! How can you look me in the face? Have you told me the worst, Milford?'"

Mrs. Mumble put her head in at the door.

"The milk's gone bad, miss."

Josephine said something. Helen, seeing it coming, closed her ears.

"We'll never keep Jordan awake," said Georgina in despair, after the shocked Mrs. Mumble had hurriedly withdrawn. "He always does this after tea. Really he is terrible. And I did so want to see how it would go."

Josephine slipped her arm about her sister's shoulder and hugged her.

"My dear, don't worry, this is a great play. The bit we've done shows that. Honestly, Helen, don't you think so?"

Helen, thus appealed to, assumed a new importance.

"Do you wish me to be frank?"

"If you're going to be frank," said Georgina, "you can shut up!"

"Honestly, lovie-babe," said Josephine cuddling the frigie Helen, "don't you think it will hit 'em in the eye?"

"Do you mean will it be a success?"

"Yes."

"It might be," Helen committed herself that far, and her sister chortled.

"There you are Georgie—even this miserable little rat says it might be. This is the play that's going to make you, Georgie—mark you, woman! Oh, what a first night—can't you see all your friends in front of the house applauding like mad?"

"Suppose they don't," said Helen.

"Why do you think we let 'em in for nothing?" demanded Josephine. "And can't you see the papers in the morning. 'The play was received with every mark of favor by an enthusiastic audience. There were loud cries of 'author!'"

"From the author's friends?" suggested Helen, and Josephine glared at her.

"You're just like a great big beam of sunlight soap. Georgie, it is no use trying to wake our dear parent. Let us do the scene between Gwendoline and her sister. You know—where Gertrude confesses she killed Gwendoline's lover."

Helen shrugged.

"I'm perfectly sure there will be young men in the audience who will be absolutely revolted," she said, "but, of course, it is nothing to do with me."

Josephine lugged a screen across the room and unfolded it so that it obscured the door.

"Now we can get the illusion of being in the New Forest," she said. "Who starts? I think I do."

CHAPTER VI.

MR. CICERO JONES had had a pleasant and, in some respects, an instructive journey from town. On the train he met an acquaintance, an elderly doctor.

"Like the country, eh?" complained the old doctor, a hard, yellow-faced man who was a martyr to gout. "I hate it! Give me the city all the time."

"You can have it," said Cicero Jones, "and if anybody questions your right to take it, tell them I gave you permission."

"You people think that all the tragedy and misery of life is found only in the cities—tucked away in the noisome and picturesque slums," the doctor went on. "Bah! The real drama of life is played in these pleasant little country villages, these fine mansion houses." He waved his hand to the passing country. "Look for sin among the roses, my boy, not behind the ash cans."

"Anyway, they're real sins and real tragedies," said Cicero Jones composedly. "If you had lived, as I have, in an atmosphere of artificiality, you would welcome even a country murder, so long as there was a real body to see and a real murderer to hang! That is why I have come, to get close to the realities, doctor."

"Don't get too close," warned the other grimly, and then grasping Cicero's arm, he pointed to a stately white house that showed through a belt of elms on the slope of a distant hill. "Pretty picture, eh?" he asked, "but that house is owned and run by a lunatic! It is a fact! A homicide—and yet sufficiently clever to deceive the doctors who were sent to examine him. His wife and family live in terror of him. Few servants stay more than a week, and every house in the neighborhood locks and bolts its doors before going to bed."

"How pleasant," said Cicero Jones, but he shuddered.

A few minutes later the doctor pointed through the other window of the Pullman.

"Do you see that beautiful red brick house by the lake?" he asked. "Looks fine, eh? You can almost see the gardens from here—they are the grandest in the country. The woman who owns that property is suspected of murdering her sister and doing away with the body in a lime kiln. It was never found. She only comes out at night and wanders through the garden, and in the daytime she is invisible."

"How interesting!" said Cicero Jones, and swallowed hard.

"I tell you the country is the place for real horrors," said the gouty doctor thoroughly enjoying himself. "I could tell you stories which would make your hair stand on end with a little encouragement. I have been called into cases—I am giving away no professional secrets—that have so filled me with fear that I haven't been able to sleep at night. Do you see that barn this side of the wood?" he pointed to a distant field.

Cicero nodded.

"Was anybody murdered there?" he asked.

"Six people," said the doctor impressively. "Murdered by a person who seemed to be the most harmless creature in the world. In fact, she was a patient of mine. It was rather a coincidence, too," he mused, "because on that tree—the big tree you see without any leaves on—it looks as though it is dead, though it isn't—old Samson Bottlehook hanged himself, as his father had before him. And on the other side of Dead Man's Copse——"

"What is the name?" asked Cicero.

"They call it Dead Man's Copse about here, but I don't know the story of it," said the doctor carelessly. "It is probably to do with some crime of years gone by. But on the other side is the county hospital—you'll see the mortuary in a minute, when we get round this bend, it is the only white block in the building."

"I don't know that I want to see it particularly," said Cicero Jones. "That's a nice-looking house," he pointed, and then hurriedly, "if anybody has been hanged or poisoned or gone mad there, you needn't tell me about it."

"That's the Widdle's house," said the doctor. "No, there is nothing wrong with those people, fine, healthy, good-natured souls. They are patients of mine. The daughter is a little mad, but I don't think dangerously so, but Widdle himself is a kindly, good-natured fellow who wouldn't hurt a fly. I always say that his keepers are absolutely unnecessary. Why, when he shot that poacher——"

"Oh, did he shoot a poacher?" asked Cicero weakly.

The doctor pointed out the identical oak tree and the exact spot thereunder where the deed had been committed.

"I was going to say, I think he was well within his rights. Now, if you want a real lunatic——" he was going on, but Cicero stopped him.

"I don't want a real lunatic," he said. "I want a real holiday. But if ever I do want a real one, doctor, I shall know where to come."

He watched the doctor disappear on his crazy trap and then climbed into a fly.

"Crap Apple Farm, sir, that's a matter of four miles from here."

Over his shoulder the fly-man became conversational as his horse clop-clopped along the dusty road. "Yes, it is a good four miles. At least, it is four miles from Hangman's Cross, and that's not half a mile from the station. I'll point it out to you. You haven't seen Hangman's Cross, have you?"

Cicero admitted that he hadn't.

"You ought to see it," the driver shook his head admiringly. "It was put up nigh on a hundred years ago to commemorate a poor farmer who was killed by some sailors. They hanged him where the cross is—that was the scaffold," he explained. "I once met a very old woman in these parts who remembered it, too. She was at the execution, said he took an hour to die."

Cicero Jones sighed unhappily.

"The funny thing about it," said the driver, after they had passed the worn granite cross, and he had stopped the fly in order to allow Cicero to get out and make a thorough inspection, "the funny thing about it is that that old farmer who was murdered used to live in that farm," he pointed with his whip. "We call it 'Gibbet House,' though some call it 'Suicide Manor.'"

"Why not call it Wild Rose Cottage?" entreated Cicero Jones.

"Because nobody ever wanted to call it that," said the driver gravely. "The funny thing about that house is that three people have committed suicide——"

"Don't tell me any more funny stories," said Cicero, "or I shall laugh myself to death. Do you know Mr. Yeoman?"

"Very Well, sir," said the flyman; "a very nice man and highly respected in these parts. His daughter is a bit queer."

"Eh?" said Cicero, startled.

"When I say she is a bit queer, I mean she is not quite all there."

"You mean she's mad?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as saying that," said the flyman, "but she's certainly got a funny way with her, and they do say that the language she uses is terrible to hear."

Cicero looked at his watch. There was not another train back for three hours.

"Tell me the worst," he said recklessly.

"The worst—well, that's about all. I'm not saying that she's mad," said the driver, with vague apprehensions of a slander suit. "Far be it from me to say that, but there is something queer about her, by all accounts. And even the rector never goes to that house."

"Is it pretty country about there?" asked Cicero.

"Yes, sir," said the driver enthusiastically; "it is certainly the most beautiful country I have ever seen. There's a lovely stretch of water quite close to the house. Dead Man's Pool they call it."

"I should have been surprised if they hadn't," said Cicero, and for the rest of the journey was silent.

He took his suit-case from the driver and stood at the gate of Crab Apple Farm with a wistful look on his face until the carriage had disappeared. The front door was open and he knocked. There was no response, but from somewhere within came the sound of voices raised in anger. He put down his suitcase, walked farther into the passage and opened the door. And then he stopped.

"'You want the truth?' asked the passionate voice of a woman.

Cicero Jones stood stock still.

"'Yes, the whole truth. Where is Reginald?'"

The second voice was that of a woman, too, and peeping through the crack of a screen he saw two girls. The first was tall and pretty. Her hair was untidy, her breast heaved with pent emotion. She who faced her was not so tall nor in a sense so handsome. Her face was set in a mould of grim determination, her hands were clenched.

"'You wish to know, sister?'" she asked slowly.

"'Yes—I—wish to know,'" said the other.

"'Your lover is no more,'" said the smaller girl.

The jaw of Cicero Jones dropped.

"'What?'"

"'I—I have killed him!'" Her voice was intense.

The other started back with an exclamation.

And then Cicero saw the small girl bend forward and speak rapidly.

"'It was for the honor of our family. It was to save our father learning the truth. I—I—knew that you were bigamously married. I discovered that yesterday.'"

"'You discovered—the truth?'"

Cicero heard the gasp.

"'Yes—that afternoon I met Reginald by the lake. I accused

(Continued on Next Page)

IT HAPPENED IN A NIGHT

By Edgar Wallace

(Continued from Preceding Page)

him! He sneered at me! All the dormant madness in me leaped to life! I sprang at him—he lost his balance and fell into the water! He tried to escape, but I thrust him down with my foot, down, down, down!' "

Cicero stepped unsteadily into the passage and closed the door. For a while he could not breathe. He was perspiring profusely and the hand that wiped his streaming face was shaking.

CHAPTER VII.

"HOW could you thrust him down with your foot?" asked Helen. "Wouldn't he get hold of your—your——"

"Leg's the word you want. Who's that?"

She heard Mrs. Mumble's voice in the passage and she was talking to somebody, then:

"Come in sir—I didn't hear you knocking, it is a good thing I came to the front door or you would have been kept waiting——"

"It is the lodger," whispered Georgie. "Helen—your cammies!"

Helen made a dart at the chair where eggs and underclothes lay, and, snatching a cushion, laid it on top of the whole with the rarest presence of mind.

"You are Mr. Jones?" said Josephine sweetly.

Cicero nodded. He could not speak. He could only stare fascinated at the girl who had discovered so drastic a method of saving the family honor. She was pretty in her less homicidal moments, he thought; her mouth was sensitive, her skin flawless.

"You would like to see your room?" said Josephine.

"Er—yes—but I can go up myself. Just tell me where it is. I—I'll find it," he said hastily.

"But I'll take you."

"No—oh no. It is not necessary, I assure you."

"I see, you wish to go alone?"

He nodded.

"Yes, that was my idea."

Josephine was making conversation and her elder sister wondered why. It was not like Josephine to take so much trouble.

"They're very nice rooms," she said. "From your sitting-room you have a lovely view of the lake."

Cicero Jones suppressed a cry.

"The lake! Oh, yes. Are there any—any keys?" he demanded urgently.

"For your room—I don't think there are. But, as I was saying, you'll find the view lovely—to-morrow if you wish I'll take you out to the lake."

"Oh—yes, you will—thank you, but I don't drink. I mean, I don't float—swim—wash—bathe, that's the word!"

The suspicion born in Josephine's mind was already taking definite shape.

"Will you be staying long?" she asked, watching him intently.

"No—a night, yes, until to-morrow," said Cicero. He was hoping that to-morrow would dawn for him.

"Only a night?" For a moment a sense of consternation overcame her doubt.

"Yes—I—er—took the rooms for a month and—of course, I'll pay—I'd better pay in advance, hadn't I?"

In her mind Josephine most fervently agreed, but she said:

"It is not at all important."

"I'd better."

Her refusal did not seem convincing, even to Cicero Jones in his agitation. He counted the money and his fingers were shaking.

"That is right, I think?" he said.

Now she was certain! She made some excuse about getting a receipt and hurried off to find Georgina, who had slipped from the room and was in the garden.

"Georgie," she gasped. "It is him—he I mean. Where is Helen?"

"He—who?"

"Come here—by the window—now peep through. Pretend not to look. You see, dark hair, long face, talks like a gentleman. Look how he fingers his chin."

"You don't mean that he's——"

"John Franklin—the bank robber!" Josephine whispered fiercely.

"Merciful heavens!"

"And the trunk in the passage is full of stolen property—we've never had so much money in the house before! Look! What did the 'Hue and Cry' say? Pretends to be nervous—why he's shivering! Woof!"

She had seen Helen enter the room.

"Stop her. Come in Georgie!"

Her heart thumping painfully, she dragged Georgina into the house, but Helen had already taken the guest under her wing.

As they went in Helen was talking—Mr. Jones seated on the edge of a chair.

"Papa said that you have had a nervous breakdown, Mr. Jones?"

He nodded.

"We often had such cases at school—I was head girl at St. Margaret's," she explained, "and from what one learnt, a nervous attack leaves you with such an awful sensation—it has been described as making you feel like a hunted criminal."

The frantic signs Josephine was making were lost on Helen. Cicero saw her warning grimace and nearly fainted. It was a house of terror—a house of strange sights and strange noises. He could hear a queer strangled sound coming from somewhere but could not locate it.

Jordan, in the depths of his chair, slept on.

"Are you staying with us long?" Helen asked, and Mr. Jones shook his head with considerable emphasis.

"Er—no—I shan't make a long stay," he said, and Helen in her grave way nodded.

"I think you are wise—very wise," she approved, "if one is restless, one should humor one's mood," and Cicero regarded her with a new and sympathetic attention. That this little more than child should live in this atmosphere of sin and crime, he thought!

"She is no sister of ours, Georgie!" said Josephine under her breath and then with her sweetest smile, "Helen!"

Helen turned.

"Yes, Josephine?"

"Come here, love," cooed Josephine. "I want you to see the beautiful rainbow."

"Rainbow?" she said incredulously.

"Yes, sweet." She gripped Helen by the arm and breathed: "Get out and stay out!"

"Why?" gasped Helen.

"Do you know who this man is?" Josephine spoke rapidly in a low voice. "That's him—the bank robber!"

Helen stared from one to the other—and fainted.

Cicero Jones witnessed the sinister scene and leapt to his feet.

"What is wrong?" he asked, and in his agitation his voice seemed no more than a squeak. "Wha—wha—what's the matter?"

"Nothing," Josephine forced her face into a smile. "She always does this when she sees a rainbow."

Between them they carried Helen into the open, leaving Cicero Jones alone.

There was another door and he tip-toed toward it. Once out of this house of happenings, he would breathe more freely. He had reached the door when, glancing round, he saw an inanimate figure huddled in the arm-chair by the fireplace. He stopped, stared, then came slowly toward it. How still it was!

"Dead!" gasped Cicero Jones, and at that moment the girls came back, leading a pale and shaken Helen between them.

"Dead!" wailed Cicero and jerked his finger toward the man in the chair.

Jordan woke with a start and sprang up. He stared wildly from one to the other, then:

" 'Let him perish!' " croaked Jordan with a dramatic power which Josephine had never suspected. " 'Let him perish!' "

Mr. Cicero Jones sat down heavily in the nearest chair.

Josephine watched him helplessly. He was sitting on the eggs.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOSEPHINE held a council of war.

What was romantically described as Georgina's garret was, in reality, a reconverted lumber-room, which bore no greater resemblance to a garret than that it had been used for the storage of furniture of odds and ends.

It was after supper before Mr. Cicero Jones had retired that Josephine beckoned her sister apart.

"I have no doubt in my mind that this is the man," she said firmly, "and if I had, it would have been set at rest by the way he keeps his suit-case under his eye. Georgina," she said dramatically, "I am going to search that bag!"

"How are you going to do it, Josephine?" she asked.

Josephine sat upon a broad settee, her arms clasping her knees, a prodigious frown on her forehead.

"I have thought it out," she said. "I shall get into his room and hide myself, and when he is asleep I'll bring the suit-case to my room, open it—have you any odd keys, Georgina?"

Georgina searched a drawer and produced a bunch of rusty keys, ranging from the key of the stable door to those queer and useless articles which are popularly supposed to lock and unlock writing cases.

Josephine searched diligently and selected six.

"Of course, it may not be locked," she said, "but if I know, it is very certain that he will take no risks."

"Helen is terrible," said Georgina, and Josephine shook her head.

"Something will have to be done about that child," she said. "Curse St. Margaret's!"

"Education spoils some people," said Georgina, "but I don't think Helen would have been any different if she had been wholly illiterate."

"She is brooding over something," said Josephine, nodding wisely. "I know, Helen! She has some uplift scheme which is going to play merry hell——"

"Josephine," murmured her sister.

"Going to play the dickens with all our plans."

Cicero Jones could never recall exactly what happened between five o'clock that evening and the hour at which Mrs. Mumble, with solemnity, so that the occasion had almost the value of a ritual, handed him a large china candlestick holding a strangely long candle. There was something funereal even in this act.

He dimly remembered that he had taken a meal with the family and that Jordan Yeoman had explained at some length how it came about that a farm house, miles from any town, enjoyed the benefit of electric light. Why he had not fled back to town he did not know.

He shook hands soberly with Jordan and followed Mrs. Mumble up the stairs.

The three girls had preceded him and in Helen's heart burnt a high resolve. She alone felt no trepidation at the thought of spending a night under the same roof as a bank robber. She knew that the worst of criminals was susceptible to the influence of a pure young girl. She had read of such things at St. Margaret's.

"This is the room, sir," said the amiable Mrs. Mumble. "There's a lovely view from the window."

The room was large and prettily furnished. The big linen basket, which stood up-ended in one corner was the only superfluity.

"You can just see the place where the young lady drowned herself last Summer," said Mrs. Mumble. "Some of them think it wasn't a case of suicide at all. And right over there, sir, there's a beautiful view of Dead Man's Wood."

"You can't see the cemetery, I suppose?" asked Cicero, but sarcasm was wasted on Mrs. Mumble.

"Not from this side of the house, sir. What you can see is the place where Lord Harringay broke his neck when he was hunting."

"If I'm alive I'll walk out to-morrow and photograph the place," said Cicero breathing with difficulty. "I feel that I ought to keep a souvenir of these beauties."

Mrs. Mumble stopped by the door on her way out.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she apologized. "I hope you're not taking any notice of Miss Josephine!"

Mr. Jones frowned.

"Josephine? That's the pretty one, isn't it?"

Then a curious thing happened. The up-ended clothes basket near the bed moved ever so slightly. It became of a sudden an interested, immensely intrigued clothes basket.

"Well, I don't know that you'd call her pretty," said Mrs. Mumble grudgingly. "Personally my idea of beauty is Miss Georgina."

"I daresay," said Cicero nodding her out. "Good night, Mrs. Mumble. I think I'll go to bed after I've done a little work."

"Good night, sir What I was going to say was, Miss Josephine gets a little hysterical now and again."

The basket went back to its earlier position.

"Is there a key to this door?" asked Cicero.

Mrs. Mumble shook her head.

"No, sir. It is very curious. The key of this door disappeared the very day Mr. Yeoman's grandfather died in this very room."

Cicero laughed hollowly.

"Excuse my laughter, Mrs. Mumble——"

"Wait, sir! Now I come to think of it, there is a key that fits this door."

"Then for heaven's sake get it," said Cicero irritably.

After she had gone he placed his suit-case by the side of the table and sat down, his head in his hands and at that moment the basket moved stealthily toward him.

Presently Mrs. Mumble returned with a huge and rusty key in her hand.

"Here you are, sir. I thought I'd find it. It was hanging in the still room."

"Thank you," said Cicero and jumped. "Phew! I didn't notice that!"

He was staring at the backet, which, in its travels, had reached the foot of the bed. He could have sworn—

"That? Oh, that's the linen basket. It oughtn't to be up here, but this is the spare room usually. Shall I move it, sir?"

The heart in the basket beat a little faster, an unseen face screwed itself up demonically.

Cicero shook his head.

"No, no. It doesn't matter, only I was almost sure....good night, Mrs. Mumble."

He went to the door with her, and the closed basket glided to the side of the table. In an instant it was raised and the suit-case had disappeared.

Mrs. Mumble hoped he would sleep well.

"Oh, I shall sleep well!" said the grim young man. "With Dead Man's Wood on one side and a beautiful view of Dead Girl's Lake on another, and the place where Lord Harringay broke his infernal neck—yes, I ought to sleep well!"

"Pleasant dreams, sir," said Mrs. Mumble, and——

"Curse it! It's locked!" The voice came hollowly from nowhere in particular and Cicero sprang round.

"Eh——?"

"I didn't speak, sir," said Mrs. Mumble.

"Strange. Where's my suit-case?" roared Cicero glaring round.

"Your suit-case, sir? You brought it up here. That's funny."

She looked under the bed. In

(Continued on Next Page)

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How a Pleasure Trip to Sunny Wales Uncovered a Secret of Mother Earth's That Forever Ends Any Woman's Need for a Complexion Beautifier

By MARTHA RYERSON

I HAVE brought to America the greatest news women ever heard about the skin. From Wales where I spent a month without seeing a single bad complexion! I went there with a complexion that had been my despair since childhood. *One afternoon I left it in the hills; exchanged it for one of absolute purity and undoubtable natural color.*

Except that I can now let you prove it for yourself, I would never tell the story — a story my own father found it hard to believe!

Hardest of all to believe is this; the tranformation took just forty minutes! Here are the facts:

About the first thing one notices in this southern English province, is the uniformly beautiful complexions. The lowliest maid—and her mother, too—has a radiantly beautiful skin. Mine, lacking lustre and color, with impurities nothing seemed to eradicate or even hide, was horribly conspicuous.

It was a happy thought that took a most unhappy girl on a long walk through the hills one afternoon. I had stopped at the apothecary's to replenish my cosmetic—to find it was unknown. They did not have even a cold cream. The irony of it! In a land where beauty of face was in evidence at every turn—the women used no beautifiers! Do you wonder I "took to the hills?" I didn't want to see another peaches-and-creamy complexion that day. But I *did.*

At a house where I paused for a drink from the spring, I stepped back in surprise when the young woman straightened-up to greet me. Her face was covered with *mud.* I recognized the peculiar gray clay of that section; very fine, sleek, smooth clay it was. Seeing my surprise, the girl smiled and said, "Madam does not clay?" I admitted I did *not!*

I Decide to "Clay"

In a moment, she wet the clay which had dried on her face and neck, wiped it away, and stood in all the glory of a *perfect* complexion. I think I shall never again envy another as I did that stolid maiden of the hills. Her features were not pretty; they did not need to be. For no woman ever will have a more gorgeous skin. She explained that this amazing clay treatment did it. The natives made a weekly habit of "claying" the skin, quite as one cares regularly for the hair.

I was easily persuaded to try it. Had I not done ridiculous things in beauty parlors where many could see my plight? We tucked a towel over my blouse, and from the spring's bed she took the soft, soothing clay and applied it.

As we sat and talked, the clay dried. Soon I experienced the most delightful tingling in every facial pore; the impurities were being literally *pulled out.* Half an hour more, and we removed the clay mask. Hopeful, but still skeptical, I followed into the tiny house to glimpse myself in a mirror.

My blemishes were gone!

I fairly glowed with color that spread down the neck to the shoulders. My cheeks were so downy soft, I felt them a hundred times on the way home. Father's surprised look when I entered the rooms of the little inn that evening was the most genuine compliment a woman ever received. In a basket I had two crocks of the precious clay. I thought father's questions would never end; where did I find it; could I take him to the spot; what was its action, and reaction, and lots else I didn't know. Father is a chemist.

Suddenly it dawned on me. He wanted to unearth the secret of that clay's amazing properties, and take it to America! For two weeks we staid on; he worked all day at his "mud pies" as I called them. Back home at last in Chicago, he worked many weeks more. He experimented on me, and on all my girl friends. At last, he scientifically produced clay identical with that Welsh clay in its miraculous effects—only ten times more smooth and pure.

Anyone May Now Have This Wonderful Clay

News of the wonders performed by this clay has brought thousands of requests for it. Women everywhere (and men too, by the way) are now supplied Forty Minute Clay. The laboratory where it is compounded sends it direct to the user. A jar is five dollars, but I have yet to hear of anyone who did not regard it worth several times that amount. For mind, in over six hundred test cases, it did not once fail. It seems to work on all ages, and regardless of how pimpled, clogged or dull the skin may be.

The application is readily made by anybody, and the changes brought about in less than an hour will cause open-mouthed astonishment. I *know.*

When I see a woman now, with a coarse-textured skin that mars the whole effect of her otherwise dainty care of self, it is all I can do to refrain from speaking of this natural, perfectly simple way to bring a skin and color such as Nature meant us to have—and has given us the way to have.

Keep your skin pores clean, open, tingling with life! My father has made you a remarkable offer below. Read carefully:

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Wm Ryerson
Head Chemist

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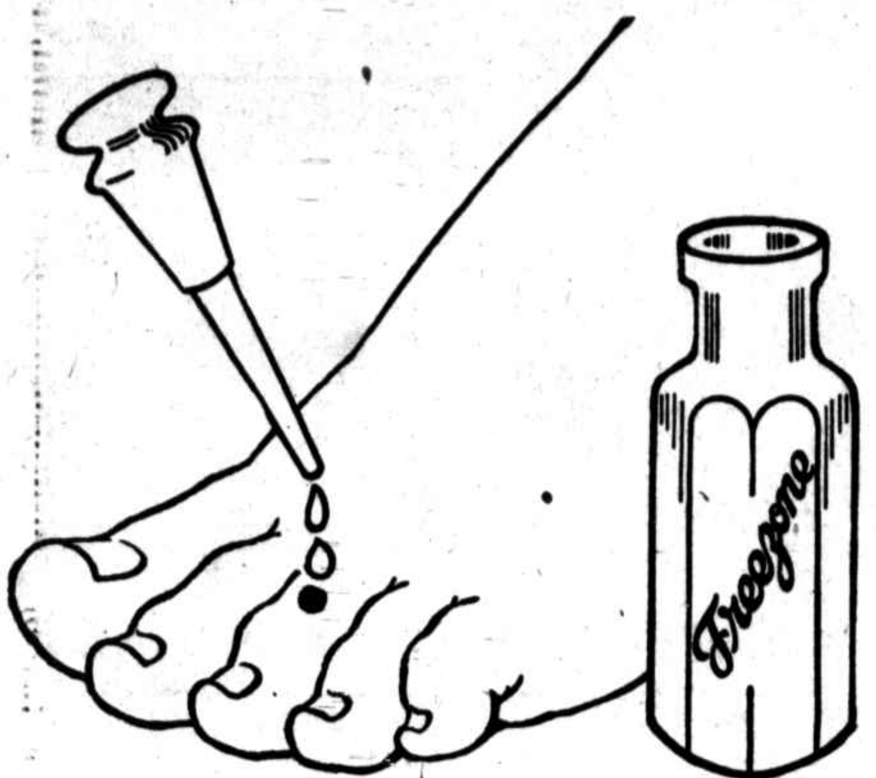

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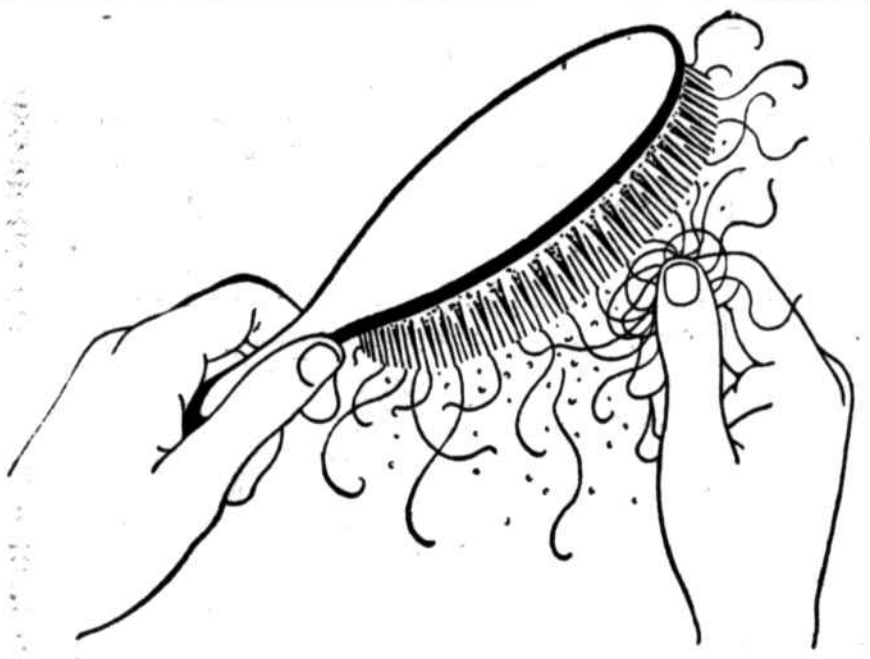

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The Babe

A Play in One Act

By Calexs Alexander

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CHARACTERS:

THE BABE.
WILLIE PYTCHLEY.
QUORN.
JIM HARRIS.

The Babe, a chic, girlish, bobbed-haired blonde of about twenty-three, and Willie Pytchley, several years younger, tall, frock-coated, sleek-haired, spatted and be-monocled, are seated on the divan.

WILLIE—I say, you know, you are quite the most refreshing thing I've seen since I left my regiment in India. Your eyes, face, hair, all of you m'dear, with an air of fragrant virginity, has me positively ratty. I've fallen for you deucedly hard y'know.

THE BABE—Oh, Willie, dear! When can we get married?

WILLIE *(stiffening with surprise and hesitant)*—Married? *(and then, softly)*—Oh, yes; of course.

THE BABE *(noticing his hesitation and drawing away)*—I see. You don't want to marry me. *(She grows tearful.)* You—y-you're only fooling with me, Willie.

WILLIE—Well you see, little girl, my uncle would raise the very deuce unless I choose a wife from—ahem—our crowd. You're sensible enough to appreciate that.

THE BABE *(slowly and with dignity)*—What right have you to suppose that I do not belong to *(a pause)* your crowd? I shall be pleased to introduce you to my father, if you wish, and I think that will settle your doubts. Of course, Willie *(she grows sarcastic)*, we haven't your reputation, but *(a pause)* anyway, see papa and judge for yourself.

WILLIE—I'd be awfully pleased. How soon can you arrange it?

THE BABE—I'll arrange it. Possibly for this afternoon. Run along home now and I'll phone you when to come.

WILLIE—Make it soon, darling, make it soon. By-bye *(and he exits)*.

(The Babe stands in the doorway and blows a kiss as an outer door is heard to close. She then goes to the telephone.)

THE BABE *(taking up the telephone instrument)*—Give me Mayfair 01145, please *(a brief pause)*—Hello, is this Mr. Quorn's office? It is? Well, may I speak with him, please. Not there! Oh, well, all right thank you. That man *(with a wise, knowing wink)* knows he's not as young as he used to be and he's avoiding me. But I'll locate him. I—I must. Try Oxford 11054, please *(a pause)*. Is this the Tennis Club? Is Mr. Quorn there? Yes, Mr. Quorn, Q-u-o-r-n. It really is important *(a longer pause)*. Hello, Quornie. I've been trying for hours to reach you. One might think that you were running away from me. You're never at your office any more. And this is SO important *(a pause, then)*: That is sweet of you, and here's what I want. I need a father. Oh *(hastening to assure him)* it's only for a few minutes. You see, I've promised to introduce a certain friend of mine to my father, and as he doesn't exist—my father, I mean—the role must be filled by some one who does. Comprenz? *(she grows impatient and talks fast, apparently interrupting the other's objections.)* Now don't ask questions. It's just a joke. All you have to do is to say "How do you do" *(she smirks and inclines her head)* when I make the introduction, then take your cues from me. Oh! Would you, could you *(pouting and nearly in tears)* refuse me? *(Now in a determined, exultant voice after listening attentively for a moment)* But you will! You will for the sake of your reputation. Do you remember those love letters you sent me last year? Ha! yes, I thought you'd forget them, and they'd look rather lurid in print wouldn't they? Yes; it may be next door to blackmail, but I'm desperate and don't care. You've just got to do this for me. You will? Oh! I just knew you would. Come right over; yes, right away. Ta-ta. *(After a pause.)* Let me have Oxford 43891. *(A pause, and then)* Is this Mr. Pytchley's home? He is in? Good, ask him to please come to the phone. Hello Willie! What do you think? Well, just after you left father called to say he was leaving the city to-night, and when I explained things to him he agreed to come right up. So come over will you? Yes, just give us a few minutes together—I haven't seen the old dear for some time—then come right along. All right, by-bye, dear.

"And to think of the lectures I've taken with each allowance check on the perils of the primrose path."

THE BABE *(shrewdly, to herself)*—Of course, it mustn't get to the announcement stage but fiancees get so much nicer letters than just little bits of fluff *(she goes round the table and takes from a drawer a thin packet of letters and a photograph.)*

(A bell rings off stage and the Babe exits through the door.)

THE BABE—Quornie, you old dear. Toddle along in.

QUORN *(portly ruddy-cheeked, immaculately dressed, is middle-aged. He speaks gruffly and with dignity)*—Well, when'll he be here? Who's the young fool anyway? If I didn't want those letters I'd never be party to such a fraud. But, I'm a silly old ass, and must pay for it. Now, what have I——

(The bell off stage interrupts. The Babe leaves Quorn standing by the fireplace and exits running through the door.)

THE BABE *(off stage)*—Father's here, Willie. Trot along, I want you to meet the old dear.

(She enters, dragging Willie by the hand.)

THE BABE *(smiling at Quorn)*—Father I want——

QUORN *(startled, interrupts)*—Willie, by heaven!

WILLIE *(retreating a step as the Babe releases his hand, and in open-mouthed wonder)*—Uncle!

(While Willie and Quorn stare in speechless amazement at each other the Babe crosses to and sits on the arm of the divan.)

WILLIE *(slowly and sarcastically)*—And to think of the lectures I've taken with each allowance check on the perils of the primrose path.

(Quorn splutters and purples with rage.)

THE BABE *(laughing immoderately)*—Forgive me, but I can't help it. This IS good.

QUORN *(tersely)*—Willie, we'll go.

THE BABE *(rising swiftly and crossing to the doorway, where she faces the men)*—Not so fast! I propose to settle this affair right now. What are your letters worth to you, Quornie?

QUORN—Look here, I'll give you a hundred pounds for the whole bally lot. I think you'll admit that's a generous offer.

THE BABE *(with rippling laughter)*—Generous? Well, you'll have to be a spendthrift and multiply that by four—then p'raps I'll think it over.

QUORN *(indignantly)*—Preposterous!

THE BABE *(quite sweetly)*—The photo is included, you know.

QUORN *(startled)*—By jove! I'd forgotten that photograph *(then glowering at the Babe)*, it's absolutely outrageous, but *(turning to Willie)* lend me your fountain pen, Willie.

(Willie and Quorn step to the table, where the latter writes his check.)

THE BABE *(quite casually)*—The bank's only three blocks away *(and smiling innocently at both)* Willie can get the check cashed in a few minutes.

QUORN *(indignantly)*—Are you insinuating that I would stop payment?

THE BABE *(beaming)*—Oh, no, Quornie; but I'm nervous to-day and cash is more soothing than a check.

(In silence Willie takes the check from Quorn and exits hurriedly through the door.)

THE BABE *(waving Quorn to a seat on the divan)*—Do sit down, Quornie. You're needlessly agitated—and that's bad for your blood pressure, y'know. Here, let me light you a cigarette. It will soothe you.

QUORN *(petulantly, from behind a cloud of cigarette smoke)*—Leave me alone. Don't make it worse. You've succeeded in getting me into a jolly rotten mess, haven't you? 'Tisn't the money, but that young beggar'll touch me for an extra five pounds every time we meet. It'll make no difference now what he does—I'll have to pay for it; you-you-you *(his voice trails off in a splutter of rage)*.

THE BABE *(soothingly)*—Now, now, Quornie. No naughty names. And don't get excited or *(shaking a finger at him)* you'll burst a blood vessel.

WILLIE *(appearing breathlessly in the doorway)*—Here I am! *(He draws a sheaf of bank notes from his pocket.)*

THE BABE *(rising and going toward him)*—Oh, how quick you were. The dear boy must have ran all the way. You did, didn't you?

WILLIE *(gulping)*—I—I hastened as best I could. Here's the money. *(He hands it to the Babe who in turn takes the packet of letters and the photograph from her dress and hands them to Quorn.)*

QUORN *(putting the packet in his pocket as he rises and secures his hat, stick and gloves)*—Now we'll go, Willie.

(Both start for the door while the Babe slips the money down the front of her dress. But midway to the door Quorn and Willie halt suddenly as the figure of a man in the unifrom of a British Tommy steps briskly into the opening. He drops an assortment of packs, havsacks and bundles to the floor and faces the three, wonderingly.)

THE BABE *(springing toward the khaki-clad man with wideflung arms)*—Jim! I—I thought you were in India. *(Her arms go around his neck and he lifts her from the floor, her heels kicking wildly.)*

JIM *(crushing her to him)*—Thought you'd be surprised. The blighters finally came through with my ticket, though *(setting the Babe down and stiffening as he looks at Willie)*. Beg your pardon, sir, I didn't recognize you before.

WILLIE *(excitedly)*—Harris, by jove! My old orderly, uncle *(turning to Quorn)*—Best I ever had.

QUORN *(smoothly, grasping the situation)*—Extraordinary coincidence. My nephew and I had just called to see if you had yet been discharged. He has spoken often of you, wondering if you'd be taken care of when you left the service—and we were telling Mrs. Harris *(waving a hand at the Babe)* to have you call at my office when you came home. Thought we might find you a job.

(Quorn approaches Jim and with an arm on his shoulder walks with him through the doorway where the latter starts to pick up the luggage he had dropped.)

WILLIE *(aside to the Babe, who is staring fearfully at the men)*—Quick! Our money back or Jim learns the truth.

THE BABE *(her lips trembling as she hands over the money which Willie receives with a contented sigh)*—I was only trying to keep a home for Jim *(she bursts into tears)*.

(Quorn, hastily handing Jim a card and signalling to Willie to follow, hurriedly exits. Willie dashes after him, passing Jim on the way. The curtain slowly descends as Jim, loaded down with his packs and equipment, looks in bewilderment down the corridor, to the card in his hand—and to the Babe, who has flung herself, weeping bitterly, down on the divan.)

CURTAIN.

It Happened in a Night

By Edgar Wallace

(Continued from Preceding Page)

her experience lost suit-cases had a habit of straying under beds.

"Oh, terribly amusing!" said Cicero between his teeth. "I'm absolutely sure I brought it up."

He dashed out of the room, followed by the old woman. Instantly the basket was raised, and a yellow suit-case thrust out.

A minute later and the two were back.

"I'm perfectly certain I brought it up here," Cicero said emphatically. "I remember putting it down by that table and——" he could only stand and stare.

"There it is all the time, sir," said Mrs. Mumble, and Cicero passed his hand across his forehead.

"Was it there before?" he asked faintly.

Helen had heard the sound of scurrying feet, and looking very young and girlish in her blue kimono, she stood at the door.

"Have you lost something, Mr. Jones?" she asked.

"Mr. Jones has found it now," said Mrs. Mumble. "Good night, sir. Good night, Miss Helen. Your father's gone to bed and so has Miss Josephine. Good night, Mr. Jones. Come along, Miss Helen."

Helen turned with a gesture which only a kimono permits.

"I wish to speak to Mr. Jones," she said quietly, and the housekeeper was aghast.

"But, my dear——"

"That is quite enough, Mrs. Mumble," not without dignity.

Mrs. Mumble retired, inwardly protesting.

"I wanted to see you, Mr. Jones, to lend you a little book," she had been primly standing at the door, but now permitted herself to venture into the room.

Cicero was for the first time amused.

"A little book? What is it, a ghost story?" he asked, and Helen shook her head.

"No, it is called 'If He Had Had His Chance'—I found it extremely useful when I was head girl at St. Margaret's, in bringing wild and turbulent spirits to a realization of their opportunities."

Cicero smiled.

"Indeed? But I'm not a wild or a turbulent spirit, Helen."

He sat on the edge of the table watching her, and saw that she had something more to say.

"I had to see you, Mr. Jones," she said at last. "I don't think I should have slept if I hadn't."

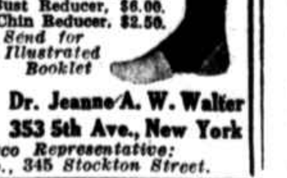
Was she going to tell him about Josephine's terrible secret? His own mind was not yet made up as to the course he should pursue. He ought to go to the police, and yet—

"I think one owes a duty to one's fellow creatures," said Helen and looking round at the open door, leant forward and in a low voice: "Mr. Jones—you are in danger!"

Cicero stood up.

"You are in mortal peril!" whispered Helen, and his blood ran cold.

(To Be Continued Next Sunday)



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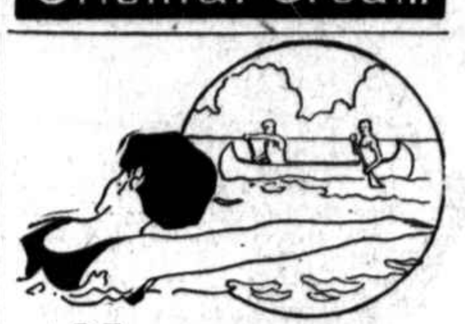

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IT HAPPENED IN A NIGHT

By Edgar Wallace

(Continued from Last Sunday)

"I don't see her, Mr. Jones, and yet I feel that she's close at hand——"

Suddenly she shrieked.

"What—what——"

"Something pinched me," howled Helen. "Oh, put on the light, please."

CHAPTER IX.

"YOU—you mean it—from —from—whom?"

"From — Josephine!" she breathed.

"Oh Lord! From the down, down, down girl?"

Helen nodded mysteriously.

"I will tell you, Mr. Jones. No, I'll sit here," she declined the invitation of the chair he offered and vaulted onto the basket.

"One moment," said Cicero, "Jo —Josephine is your sister?"

Helen tightened her lips.

"Yes. I often regret it," she said. "First let me explain the extraordinary scene which you witnessed, a scene which can only be compared to the occasion when Miss Reppley came unexpectedly into the dormitory and discovered the senior prefect reading 'Three Weeks' to the innocent children of the fifth form. We have a great secret in this house."

So it was true! His breath came faster.

"I understand," he said quietly.

"My sister, who has a sanguinary, if literary mind, and who murders on an average three persons a week—one of whom is usually a child of tender years——"

"Good God!" gasped Cicero, and Helen's blue eyes reproved him.

"I'd rather you didn't swear," she said. "Naturally——" she stopped suddenly and rubbed her leg. Something had stung her left calf.

"But you—you poor child. Do you have to stand by?"

"I am helpless," said Helen, shaking her head, "I have no authority. Now if I were at St. Margaret's——"

"But you say I am in danger?"

"Yes—deadly danger. Josephine would stop at nothing."

"Then—what do you advise me to do?"

"Make your escape whilst you can," said Helen firmly. "Wow!" She leapt to the floor with a scream and rubbed herself at great speed. "Something stuck into me," she explained, and peered down at the basket. "It is a hairpin! I'm sorry." When she looked again the hairpin was gone.

"Suppose I do not clear out?" he asked, "what will happen to me?"

"Surely, Mr. Jones, you know," she said reproachfully. "I don't want to hurt your feelings, but—but——" In an excess of emotion her voice grew husky and shook, and her words sounded in his ears like the knell of doom. "You will go away to a place which is beyond the reach of your loved ones!"

Cicero Jones reeled.

"There is no time to be lost," he said.

"Remember," said Helen, "Josephine is a courageous woman—Hark!"

"I thought I heard a sound—a creaky sound," said Helen.

Cicero crept to the door and peered into the half darkness of the corridor. He remembered vaguely that Georgina—was that the taller one's name?—said that Josephine walked in her sleep. He came back to whisper an inquiry of the important Helen, a majestic figure, tingling with the greatness of the moment.

"That is part of the plot to trap you," she said instantly. "You think I am being disloyal to my sister—it can bear that interpretation. But I should be false to the principles which I acquired at St. Margarets if I didn't try to help you."

"Where is your sister now?"

"She's not in her room!" she breathed. "Perhaps she is in the garden. She often goes there at night."

They walked cautiously to the window and stared into the dark. Slowly the basket followed, making blindly for the door. There was a muttered curse as it missed the opening, and cannoned sideways to where the two were watching, but neither heard.

"I see nothing," said Helen tremulously.

"And I—We-ow!"

Cicero's hand had touched the basket and he sprang round.

"W-what's that?" he squeaked.

Helen looked.

"How you frightened me," she whispered. "It is the linen basket!"

He could only point a wavering finger from one part of the room to the other.

"It was there—then it was there! Now it is here!"

"Poor, Mr. Jones," she said softly, "how well I understand your state of mind! Try to forget your trouble. You are distraught. If she is in the garden we shall see her. If she's lurking——"

"Wait!" said Cicero. "She'll see us!" He walked to the wall and switched out the light. "Now open the window."

They thrust out their heads, searching the dark garden left and right.

"I don't see her, Mr. Jones, and yet I feel that she's close at hand——" Suddenly she shrieked.

"What—what——"

"Something pinched me," howled Helen. "Oh—put on the light, please."

He stumbled to the wall, his hand groping wildly for a switch unfamiliarly located. At last he found it. The first thing he saw was an overturned linen basket.

Helen, ashen faced and wide-eyed, was leaning against the wall. He thought she was swooning and jumped to her side.

The basket he must have knocked over in his rush to the light switch, he decided; he did not think it was strange that it lay now at the foot of the bed.

Helen waved his attentions aside. She was calm at last, loath to leave the scene in which she played a principal character. The house was silent—Cicero Jones extremely wakeful and apprehensive. Also he did not wish to be alone. Thus, both might excuse the impropriety of the interview.

"Would it pain you," he questioned her, "if I asked you to tell me about your sister's lover—the dark one?"

"Georgina's?"

He nodded.

"Yes—do you know what happened to him?"

"Ernest Charles?" Helen knitted her brows. "Do you know, I haven't seen him for quite a long time!" she confessed, and Cicero shivered slightly.

"I know that you haven't," he said with significance.

"The last time?" said Helen thoughtfully, "let me see—he was walking by the lake—with Josephine!"

The young man breathed heavily.

"Well, he'll never walk by the lake with Josephine any more," he said sombrely. "Why not? Because he's down, down, down!"

Helen was not surprised. Ernest Charles was always a little depressed when he was with Josephine. In fact, Josephine had the knack of depressing most people. She said so.

"Now he's suppressed," said Cicero.

"If he had a little more spirit——"

"That's what the poor fellow will never have," said the grim Cicero. "Helen, what am I to do?"

"Stay here, lock yourself in, and put the key in your pajama pocket."

There was a groan, a hollow, heart-rending groan that came from the further end of the room.

Cicero blinked.

"Wh—what was that?" he asked.

"I think it is a water pipe."

"What on earth are you doing here, Helen?"

Helen turned with a start. Standing in the open doorway was Georgina. She had the appearance of having been roused from sleep. It was an artistic effect.

"Come in, Georgina," quavered Helen. She felt a little nervous.

"I heard your voice," said Georgina coldly. "I didn't know you were entertaining our guest, Helen!"

"I had something to say to Mr. Jones."

"Well, you can say it downstairs, my dear," said Georgina sweetly. "Mr. Jones, I've made some cocoa for you—won't you take Mr. Jones down, Helen? He'd love to see your school certificate and the—the prize you won for elocution."

Mr. Jones welcomed a graceful exit from a scene which might easily have been embarrassing. He waited at the door, expecting Georgina to follow.

"I want to put a new pillow slip on your bed," said Georgina glibly. "I came hoping you were still awake. We are rather particular about pillow slips at Crab Apple Farm—er—a sort of family tradition."

She heard their feet upon the stairs, and called hoarsely: "Josephine!"

The door of a cupboard at the end of the room opened, and a dishevelled Josephine staggered forth.

"Did you find anything?" asked Georgina eagerly.

"Do you think I should be fined for murdering Helen?" she asked. "Is it still a crime in this country to kill one's sister? I could plead——"

"Did you make any discovery?"

"Nothing," said Josephine bitterly.

"The suitcase?"

"Locked, and none of the keys fitted! But the bonds are there—I heard the rustle of paper. I'm going to make sure—where's Jordan?"

"He's gone to bed. Jo! Do you think it is safe?"

"Safe! He's scared to death! Go downstairs and keep them there for half an hour. Encourage Helen to talk. God knows she doesn't want any encouragement! Did you tell him I walked in my sleep?"

Georgina nodded.

"It wasn't necessary. I thought of coming back in the middle of the night, but I needn't do that." She lifted the suitcase and shook it. "Listen! Get my keys out of my dressing case——"

"Quick!" she gasped, "they're coming back!"

Josephine dropped the suitcase, gathered up her dressing gown, and ran. The door of the cupboard had scarcely closed upon her before the two came back.

Georgina was in a panic. If Helen had only detained him another five minutes!

"Why don't you take Mr. Jones into the garden, Helen? It is lovely on a moonlight night...."

Cicero Jones looked at the girl by his side and their eyes met. So Georgina was in it! They wanted to get him into the garden....!

"I don't think so," he said.

"Well, won't you come into the garden with me?" asked Georgina desperately.

"NO!" said Cicero emphatically.

"Mr. Jones doesn't want to go into the garden," said Helen, "and really, I don't think father would like it."

Georgina could have murdered her on the spot. She must get Josephine out of the room by some ruse or other. Suddenly Cicero felt his arm gripped, and he was dragged, protesting, to the window.

"The lake looks lovely," cried Georgina hysterically, "you can see it from here. Keep your eye fixed on the lake and you'll see the most wonderful sight. The ghost of Queen Elizabeth...."

"Don't want to see it!" roared Cicero, dragging himself clear. "Don't want to see it!"

Helen's nose went up into the air.

"I think we had better go to bed," she said, and Georgina closed her eyes and prayed. She was at the end of her resources, and it rattled her to know that Helen, watchful and superior, had recovered command of the situation. She could do no more. Raising her voice, she spoke, but it was the concealed Josephine she addressed.

"Good night! I'll be on hand—but you'll have to get out of this as best you can!" and she dragged Helen from the room.

She was threatening him! There was no longer any attempt at concealment. Openly and defiantly she had threatened him. He locked the door, and taking out the key, laid it on the window ledge. He did not undress. Sleep was not for him that night. He wished he had brought a book but—the manuscripts! Those blessed scripts Morpeth had given him. He fetched them out of his suitcase and began reading, and as he read, he grew interested. He was turning the second leaf of the second act when he heard a sound. Dropping the script to his knees he listened. It was repeated, and he rose, his knees wobbling.

"Who's there? There's someone in that cupboard! Come out!"

He felt his hair rise as the door of the cupboard slowly opened, and Josephine came out. Her eyes were wide open, her hands outstretched as though she was groping for something. With deliberate, stately strides, she walked past him to the door.

"She's walking in her sleep," gasped Cicero.

At the door, the eerie figure fumbled for a moment.

"Where's the key?" she asked sharply—too sharply for a somnambulist.

"You're awake!" he pointed an accusative finger. "You're awake!"

Josephine opened and shut her eyes rapidly.

"Where—where am I?" she asked. "I remember—I saw you —you fixed your eyes on me....I wake to find myself here with you alone....you hypnotised me!"

At that moment there was a heavy step in the passage and a sharp rap on the door.

"Jones!" said Jordan's voice.

"Your father!" whispered the horrified Cicero.

CHAPTER X.

IT came upon them both that the position was an awkward one. Josephine was already clutching her dressing gown decorously; Cicero was wishing he hadn't taken off his collar.

They were together and the door was locked.

"Can I see you for a minute?" demanded Jordan's voice.

"Your father! And you here in these—these perfectly horrible circumstances!" said Cicero, and Josephine was instantly penitent.

"I'm so sorry! Open the door and I'll explain."

He hesitated for a second, then went to the window for the key. His hand shook so....she heard his oath.

"What's the matter?"

"I've dropped the key out of the window," he wailed.

"Tell him!" hissed Josephine.

"I've dropped the key out of the window, Mr. Yeoman," shouted Cicero. "I locked the door and put the infernal thing on the ledge."

"Why the dickens did you lock the door?" grumbled Jordan's voice. "I'll go down and get it."

They stood in silence.

"Miss Yeoman, I swear that I had no idea you were here——"

"Of course you hadn't," said Josephine, full of remorse. "It was all my own stupidity. When he comes I'll get into the cupboard. Mr. Jones, I'm so sorry," she held out her hand.

"Not so sorry as I am," said Cicero truthfully.

"I've greater cause," she said, and then: "I'm going to let you go."

"Let me go?"

She nodded.

"You know what I mean. I feel very sorry for you now. It has come to me suddenly what this life means to you."

Cicero scratched his head.

"I don't understand you."

"You have something in that bag—some papers. I won't be more explicit. I know who you are."

He could only look at her.

"And you're sorry for me," he gripped her hand. "You're the first person I've ever met who has understood what a perfectly rotten job I've got."

"You ought really to return them," said Josephine. "I know I'm being Helenish, but you ought."

"Return 'em both?" asked Cicero incredulously.

"Are there only two?" asked Josephine in amazement.

"Only two!" he said. "I don't know why you're taking this interest in me, and I'm afraid I must be guided by my judgment. It wouldn't be fair to Morpeth——"

"Is he your—confederate?"

"That's the very word! I should be rather letting him down. I don't suppose a tragedy more or less matters with him——"

"Here's the key—catch!" It was Jordan's voice outside, and Mr. Jones ran to the window. He thrust the key in the lock and opened the door to—Helen.

Josephine shrank back behind the bed board.

"I'm so sorry, bothering you, Mr. Jones, but you know I am quite alarmed about Josephine. I've searched the house and Daddy has been into the garden," said Helen in distress.

"One moment whilst I—I—er—get my watch and chain," said poor Cicero, and closed the door on her. He turned in time to see Josephine disappear under the basket—and he began to understand things.

"Have you seen or heard anything of Josephine?" demanded Jordan, who seemed worried. "Helen tells me that she is not in the house....I thought you might have been talking to her from the window. She has a trick of mooning about the garden at night."

The basket was moving slowly but surely.

"Josephine?" said Cicero recklessly. "Good Lord, yes....saw her in the garden a few minutes ago. Just come over here, Mr. Yeoman....and Helen please." He almost dragged them to the table by which his suitcase stood. This he lugged to the table, and snapped open. The basket was travelling faster now; was halfway to the door. If he could hold their attention....!

"I want to show you something," he said, rummaging furiously in the case. "Something I don't suppose any of you have ever seen?" He jerked out a small silver box. "You'll never guess what that is," his voice was shrill, his tone intense.

Jordan thought he had been drinking and was perfectly sure he had, when the case was opened to reveal nothing more remarkable than a safety razor. By that time the basket had scuttled through the open door. Jordan fell over it when he came out, and said things which Helen never dreamt a God-fearing man could say.

CHAPTER XI.

JOSEPHINE came down to superintend the breakfast, and Mrs. Mumble thought that she was unusually quiet. Even Jordan, who was not sensitive to the moods of his children, remarked upon her saddened attitude, and spoke earnestly of her liver.

The great opportunity had come to Josephine and she had allowed it to pass. Theoretically, the business of handing over a criminal to the police was a very simple one, but in practice.... She liked the errant Jones. He had been so decent....so kindly. She liked him—just that and nothing more. She was not the romantic kind, she told herself. Georgina was. He liked Georgina. She could see that by the attention he paid to her at breakfast. She was sitting thinking when Mrs. Mumble brought in the post.

"Put 'em down," said Josephine dreamily.

Mrs. Mumble had fallen under the spell of the man's charm, apparently, and stopped to contribute a word of praise.

"The way he's getting on with Miss Georgina! You'd think they'd known one another for years," she said ecstatically, "and Mr. Dowling's watching 'em so jealous!"

Josephine roused herself.

"Chink—Mr. Dowling—is he here?"

"In the garden, miss. He looked perfectly ghastly when Mr. Jones took Miss Georgina's hand."

"I don't want to know anything about it," said Josephine brusquely, but the good lady was not so easily silenced.

"Miss Georgina might go further and fare worse," she remarked. Josephine snapped her to silence and was sorry.

"What about dinner to-night?"

"There's lamb," suggested the housekeeper.

"Lamb! Haven't those cursed lambs grown up yet?" demanded Josephine savagely. "I'm sick of lamb. What did he take her hand for?" she asked.

"She got a thorn in her finger from one of them blush roses; but he did it in such a way!"

The woebegone face of Ernest Charles Dowling appeared at the window, and Josephine beckoned him in. He welcomed the invitation.

"Can I have a word with you, Josephine?"

Mrs. Mumble, scenting drama, was reluctant to leave.

"Josephine," he said when she had gone, "you know—everybody knows how I feel toward Georgina."

"Of course you do," he said indignantly, "you must have seen ....you must have noticed my—my state of mind!"

"Do you mean that you love Georgina?" she asked bluntly.

"Of course I do. Dash it.... of course I do!"

"There's no 'of course' about it. Well, what of it, Chinky?"

"I thought she—she felt the same way," said the miserable young man, and demanded wrathfully: "Who is this Jones?"

"Well, he is—'this Jones.' That's who he is. He differs from all the other Joneses by being this Jones," said Josephine.

"They're as thick as—as thieves!" Mr. Dowling's eye was wild. "They've gone down to the postoffice together, and she's only known him ten minutes!"

"Charles Ernest, you have no right in the world to call my sister's conduct into question," she said viciously. "What are you to her? A carrier of flowers and punk poetry!"

"Punk," said the horrified Ernest, "what do you mean, punk poetry?"

"When a man rhymes 'tender' with 'bend her,' he's a punk poet," said Josephine. "Punk is an expressive word which I culled from the movies. Besides——" she stopped when she saw his face.

"I—I'm feeling pretty bad about it, Josephine," he said. "It isn't natural for people to be in love with one another after they've only known each other for a few hours; it isn't—right."

"It is very, very natural and it is right," disagreed Josephine, "and say nothing before Helen. If she thinks you're in love with Georgina, she'll write to the papers about it."

"I suppose I am a fool," said Ernest despondently.

"Of course, you're a fool," said the candid Josephine. "Any man is a fool who thinks a girl is to be won with verse and vegetables. They only please, and no woman wants to be pleased and pleased and pleased! You should have taken her when you had the chance."

"Whatever is the matter with you?" asked Helen when he had gloomed himself into the open.

"Nothing—now what is your trouble?"

"Do you know, Josephine, I've been thinking about Mr. Jones. I'm not so sure that I like him."

"That ought to break his heart," said Josephine sarcastically.

"Don't be horrid. I've done a lot for that man. More perhaps than any other woman would have done," said Helen, and Josephine wondered if this was the head girl of St. Margaret's speaking. "But —I don't know, I seem to have taken a dislike to him to-day."

"Why?"

"Well, he's—fickle. This morning he has taken scarcely any notice of me——"

"And you put yourself in his way, too—I noticed that," interrupted her sister.

"We had a secret in common," said Helen with dignity, "but there's such a thing as cheapening one self. What I'm worrying about is, are we doing right in sheltering this man? Are we doing our duty as good citizens—as loyal subjects of the king—for whom I pray every night?"

"Ought to have Mr. Jones arrested? Is that what you mean?"

Helen nodded.

"Yes. I've given him his chance. I've offered him advice. If he thinks more of Georgina's opinion than mine—well, let the law take its course!"

"You blood-hound!" said Josephine admiringly.

It was some time before Georgina came back from the village, and seeing her flushed face and shining eyes, Josephine's heart sank.

"I've something to tell you," she said, and Josephine followed her up to her study, determined to give what help she could to these strange lovers. It required an effort on her part....exactly why the effort was needed she could not tell herself.

Georgie shut the door.

(Continued on Page 12)

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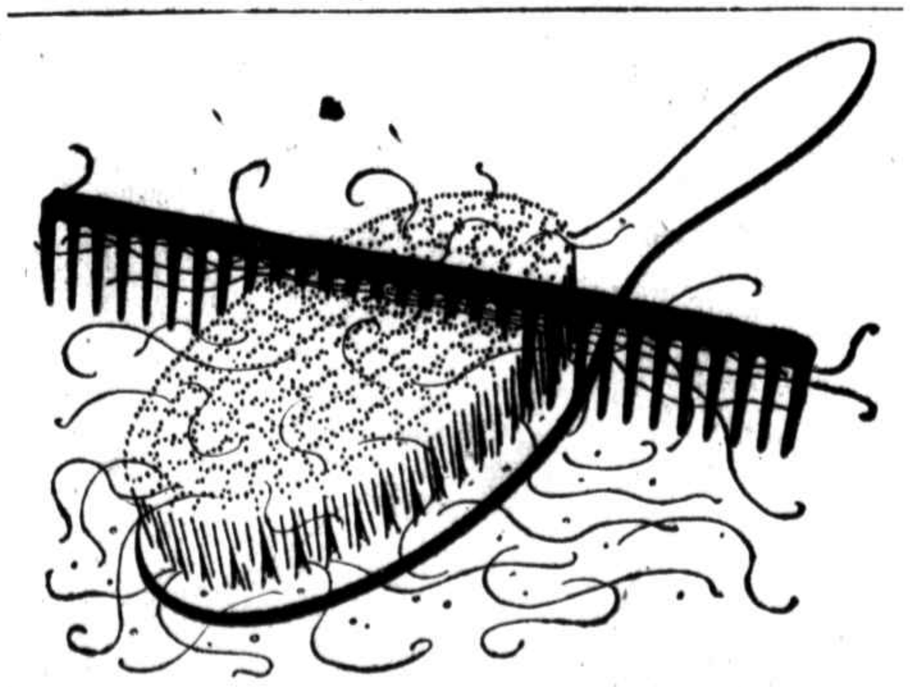

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IT HAPPENED IN A NIGHT By Edgar Wallace

(Continued from Page 10)

"He is the man!" she said, and her sister stared.

"I knew that all along——"

"He sent a wire," said Georgina, "a code wire! I saw it over his shoulder as he wrote." She unfolded a paper. "Here it is, I copied it—'To Muchtalk. Both O. K. Buy.' "

"Muchtalk?"

"A code message to a companion in crime," said Georgina thrillingly, "think of it! There's Jordan." She dashed out of the room and yelled down the stairs.

Jordan came up at a run. Into his uncomprehending ears Georgina babbled her incoherent story.

"But who is he?" asked the puzzled man.

"I don't think it matters who he is," said Josephine brusquely. "You haven't played the game with him, anyway."

Georgina looked at her aghast.

"But, Jo! I thought you wanted him captured?"

"Who is he?" asked Jordan again.

It was Georgina who replied.

"He is the—the bank robber!"

"Who?" asked Jordan staggered.

"The man Jo was looking for, John Franklin!" She met Josephine's reproachful eyes; there was a hint of tears in them, too.

"How can you, Georgie, after he has been so nice to you. And you to him!"

"But—I—thought——" began the bewildered girl.

"The man is fond of you!" said Josephine vehemently. "Even Mrs. Mumble could see that—you—you—led him on until he betrayed himself! It was rather hateful of you—what is amusing, you, Jordan?"

Jordan Yeoman was shaking with laughter.

"You poor detectives! Franklin was arrested yesterday!"

CHAPTER XII.

THERE was a dead silence.

"Come down, it is in the newspaper."

"Here you are. 'John Franklin, the man wanted in connection with the Ninth National Bank robbery, was arrested at Rochester yesterday morning.' "

"Then who is Mr. Jones?" asked the girls in chorus.

"Who should he be—but Mr. Jones—are those the letters?" He took an envelope from Helen's hand.

"None for you daddy, one for Georgie."

"But," began Josephine, "if he isn't——"

"Leave him alone," said Jordan. "What is your letter, Georgie?"

She slit the envelope and took out a large sheet of paper. For a moment she could not grasp the meaning of the message the sheet carried, and then with a wild whoof she sprang up from the chair.

"They've gone!—they've gone!" she cried, and danced her joy.

"What has gone, besides your mind?" demanded Josephine.

"My plays have gone to be read by the Tremendous Jones," said Georgina breathlessly. "Listen. 'Dear Madam: I have read the two plays which you have submitted and like them, but am taking a further opinion upon them. I will write you again when I have had an opportunity of consulting Mr. Cicero Jones, my reader. Sincerely, H. Gallet-Morpeth.' "

Josephine screwed up her forehead.

"Morpeth? Where have I heard that name?"

"Morpeth is a town to the north of Newcastle with a population of 76,000," murmured Helen.

"And here's a p. s. written in Mr. Morpeth's own hand," Georgina went on. " 'Mr. Jones is taking your two plays with him into the country. I shall be able to give you his opinion very soon. These are the only two plays he is reading.' Isn't it wonderful—isn't it ravishing, Jo! The Tremendous Jones! At this very minute he's probably reading 'The Wanderer!' "

"Don't set your hopes too high, old girl!" warned Jordan. "This Terrific Jones——"

"Tremendous."

"Well, whatever he is, he might not like the stuff."

"Isn't it gorgeous—and what beautiful paper it is written on."

Josephine took the sheet and read mechanically:

" '347 Leicester Buildings. Telephone. . . .Telegraphic address'—what's that word—'Muchtalk'—oh, hell and treacle."

"Josephine, my sweet daughter!" protested her shocked parent.

"He said he had two in his bag and I told him to send them back!" said Josephine in a hushed voice.

"Who—what?"

"Our Mr. Jones—is the Tremendous Jones!"

They looked at one another, speechless for a second.

"No!"

"The wire!" said Josephine. "He said they were O. K.—buy them! But he didn't know that we were the George Yeo's! And he didn't know that George Yeo's sister had tried to rob him and had broken into his room—swear for me, Jordan, darling! Helen, leave the room!"

"I shan't. I certainly shan't! It is very awkward, isn't it!"

"What do you mean by robbing him?" asked Jordan, and the truth came out.

"I tried to steal his suitcase."

"I have it!" said Helen. "Suppose I see him and explain everything——"

"Father," said Josephine, with quiet earnestness, "and you realize how serious the position is when I call you that—I must insist upon your muzzling Helen."

"If I went to him very nicely and took him into the garden——" she suggested.

"Woman! Be silent!" hissed Josephine. "What we have to do is this. We've got to keep from him the fact that these plays are yours, Georgina. The word 'play' must never be uttered in this house."

"Absolutely," agreed Georgina.

"Any reference to the theatre is taboo——"

"Suppose I said to him——" began Helen.

"Jordan! Assert your rapidly vanishing authority," ordered Josephine. "Couldn't you send Helen to Aunt Marjorie's?"

"I won't go! I'll be dashed if I go, so there!" said Helen with determination.

Jordan was in a dilemma.

"I'm not in this," he said. "You understand? I'm not in it, but at the same time, I suggest to you that if you are going to carry out this plan of yours, you had better have some definite policy."

"The policy is a simple one," said Josephine. "No word about plays in the first place. If we can convey the impression that we disapprove of the modern drama, so much the better."

"If we only knew what the papers had been saying about plays lately?" wailed Georgina.

"I could tell you if Helen wasn't here," said Josephine. "The point is, that nothing must be said or done which can in any way associate us with the drama. You understand, don't you, Helen, darling angel?"

Helen tossed her head with a hurt smile.

"Don't be nasty, ducklums," Josephine pleaded. "You won't give it away, will you? If you do. I'll hang your cammy on the line with a big notice attached, 'Helen's Hundies!' "

The plan was no sooner adopted when complications appeared in the shape of Ernest Charles Dowling, and he was in that mood of purpose when he could neither be persuaded to accompany Jordan to the sties, nor be satisfied with Helen amongst the roses.

"I want to see Georgina," he said. He was very pale.

Jordan signalled to his brood.

"Alone" added Mr. Dowling.

"Alone, Chinky?" said Georgina in surprise, "why, is anything the matter?"

Josephine nodded to the door, and they stole forth, leaving Chinky to the fulfillment of his wish.

"I think it is so absurd making a mystery of a proposal," said Helen outside.

Josephine said nothing. The look in Chinky's eyes told her all that she need know. Georgina would be happy.

She sat down on the low garden wall—Omar's wall they called it, because it divided the desert from the sown—and watched Jordan until he was out of sight. Then she saw the Tremendous Jones, and slipped down out of sight, flying to the cover of the rustic Summer house which she and Georgina had built. He passed into the house, and a minute later Georgina and Chinky came out, and Chinky was radiant.

She turned her head away that she might not embarrass Georgina by witnessing their leave-taking, and when the young man had gone, she joined her sister.

"Chinky is a darling, but . . . it complicates matters frightfully. Chinky says Mr. Jones is in love with me. I like Mr. Jones enormously. I think he is divine, but, of course, he's not the kind of man I could love."

"I should say that if you could love Ernest Charles, you could love anybody," said Josephine unpleasantly. "What do you propose?" she asked.

"I mustn't let Mr. Jones know about my engagement."

"That's all right," said Josephine, "but does that also mean that you have to lure Mr. Jones on to believing that his affection is returned? Because, it it does, dearly beloved sister, I'm like Jordan, I'm not in it!"

CHAPTER XIII.

CICERO JONES felt strangely and blissfully rested. Why this should be the case after a few hours' sleep that followed upon the most nerve-racking night, he was at a loss to explain.

He saw the girls in earnest consultation, and paused in the doorway to admire the straight back and clear skin of Josephine. There was something very vital, something immensely capable about her. She was so real, so alive in the sunlight of morning. So very much of the garden which had scented his room before he woke.

"I haven't seen you since last night, Miss Josephine," he said.

Helen approached and the three discussed the beauty of the valley.

"The school dram had a scene painted showing the village cross," explained Helen.

"The school dram—oh, you had a dramatic society?" Mr. Jones was interested.

"Rather," said Helen. "I used to produce—as head girl, I was, of course, chairman of the society. Being brought up in an atmosphere of drama, naturally I knew all the tricks of the trade."

"How interesting!" said Mr. Jones. "What plays did you do?"

" 'The School for Scandal'—'The Pirates of Penzance' and we did an awfully good little sketch which Georgina——"

"Sent to you!" interrupted Josephine explosively. "Yes, I remember. Of course, we know nothing whatever about plays."

Georgina's glare was fiendish, but Helen, conscious of her superior tact, and her ability to turn the conversation at will, smiled encouragingly.

"Are you interested in plays?"

"No—oh, no," said Josephine, shocked. "Oh dear no! We live a very quiet, natural life here. And the theatre is so artificial, don't you think? Helen, love, will you help me bandage the cow's nose? Come along, sweetie."

How like Ernest Charles it was to put in an appearance at that moment! He was one of those men with the fatal facility of coming back. They did not see him until he was on them. His cold eye fell upon Mr. Jones, and he nodded stiffly.

"Plays?" he said, "are you talking about plays?"

"We were," said the Tremendous Jones pleasantly.

"Georgina writes under the name of George Yeo," said Mr. Dowling.

He felt he was helping to spread the fame of his fiancee, but he did not foresee the effect upon the boarder. Mr. Cicero Jones looked from one to the other in amazed wonder.

"Then you are—George Yeo? What an extraordinary coincidence that I should come to this farm!"

"What an extraordinary coincidence that there's a farm to come to!" said Josephine unsteadily.

Half an hour later, long after Josephine had come away from the hectic group, congratulators and congratulated, Cicero walked into the kitchen. He came to the kitchen because he could find Josephine nowhere else. It was Mrs. Mumble's day off and Josephine was making a rice pudding.

She nodded gravely to him, and he took a chair.

"You—you don't feel very bad about our—not telling you?" she asked, and hung on his words.

"Feel bad about it?" said the young man in wonder. "I don't quite know what you mean."

"That's all right," said Josephine with a deep sigh. "They are wonderful plays."

He nodded.

"I think they are. A lot of it, of course, is sheer melodrama."

"Melodrama?"

"Yes—a little extravagance of language, and a little impossibility of situation, for example——"

"I know—I know" she said suddenly, and then striking an attitude, she recited: " 'That afternoon I met Gregory by the lake. I accused him. He sneered at me. All the dormant madness in me leapt to life. I sprang at him——' "

Mr. Jones listened dumbfounded.

" 'He lost his balance and fell into the water. He tried to escape but I thrust him down with my foot—down, down, down!' "

He put his hand to his forehead.

"Down, down, down!" he repeated. "What a lunatic I am. It was in 'The Wanderer!' Do you ever rehearse your sister's plays?"

She smiled.

"We often do that. We were rehearsing that very scene yesterday when you came. . . . Mr. Jones, I have a confession to make to you. Have you seen the notices pinned on the curtains in the dining-room?"

"The Wanteds and Missings?"

"You will think I am childish," she went on, "but—well, we aren't very well off, and I suppose that when one isn't very well off, one dreams of windfalls. I thought you were such! I have always had an idea that one of these days a celebrated criminal for whose capture a big reward was offered would come our way."

"You thought I was—what?"

"A bank robber," said Josephine.

So that was why she had come to his room! The inexplicable was most simply explained.

"Come here, young person," he said severely, and drew another chair toward him. "Sit down whilst I tell you what I think of you. . . ."

Helen had, as she often confessed, seen in her life many remarkable sights. She hoped to see many more, but never had she dreamt that. . . .

"I shouldn't go in, father," she said quietly, standing guard on the outer door, "and I shouldn't go to the Summer house, if I were you. . . .Ernest and Georgina are there."

"Rubbish—who's in the house?"

"Mr. Jones and Josephine," said Helen, and shook her head. "I saw quite enough to convince me that we are going to have a Jones in the family."

Jordan whistled and went back to the pigs.

THE END.

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